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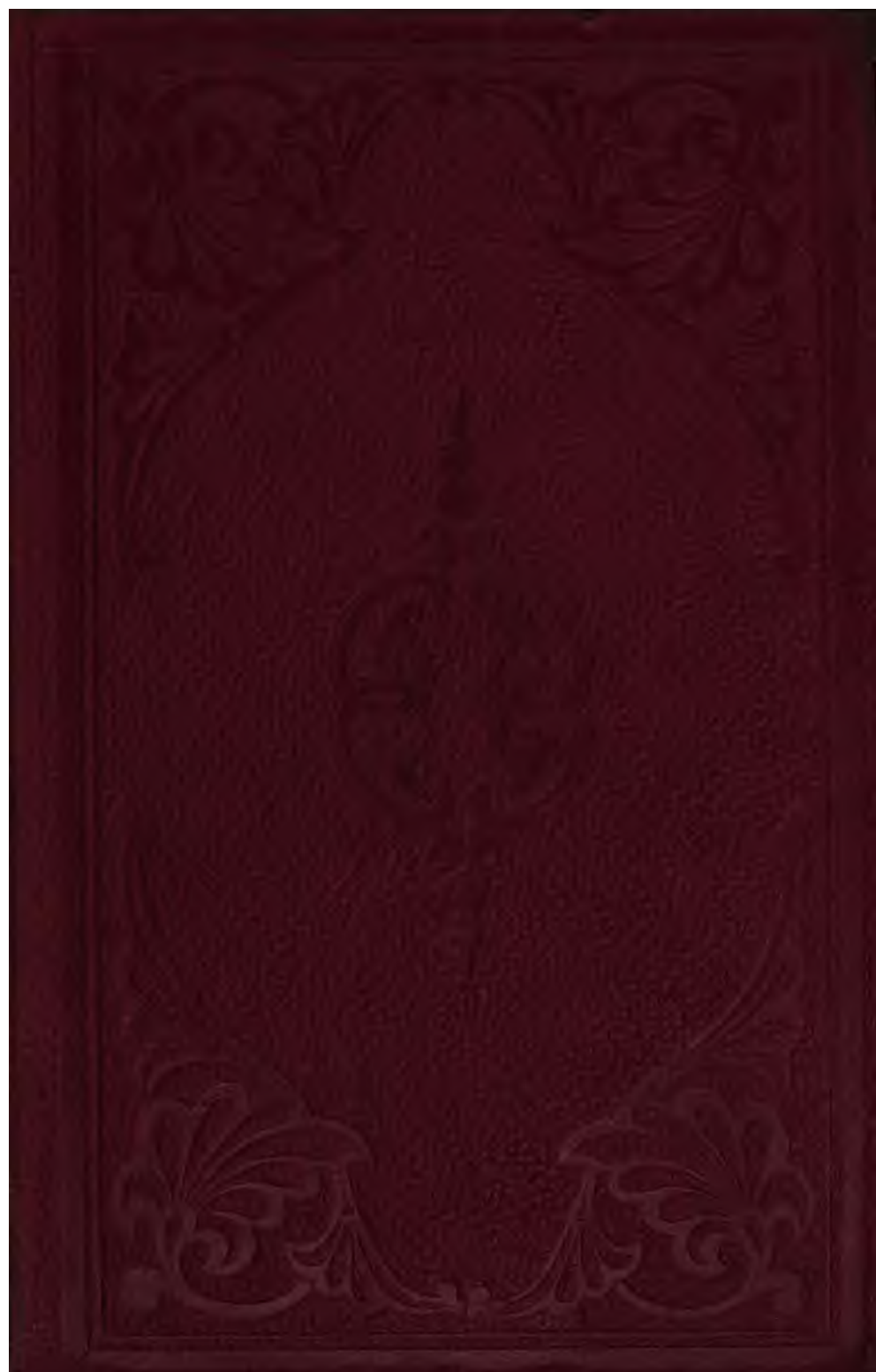
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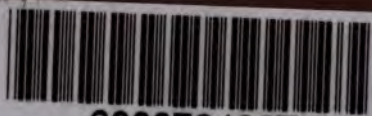
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# BURTON ABBOTS:

A WOMAN'S STORY.

IN FOUR BOOKS.

VOL. II.

London:

T. CAUTLEY NEWBY, PUBLISHER,  
30, WELBECK STREET, CAVENDISH SQUARE.

1863.

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# BURTON ABBOTS.

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## BOOK II.—CHAPTER IV.

### AN UNLOOKED-FOR PROPOSAL.

"Men have a touchstone whereby to try gold ; but gold is a touchstone whereby to try men."

WE drove home when the shadows were lengthening, and a soft breeze was sweeping the white dust off the foliage. The ponies knew that their heads were turned homewards and trotted briskly, shaking their ears indignantly at the tormenting flies, and bearing the

light carriage smoothly over the road. It was very pleasant going thus along the green lanes, watching the shifting clouds and the crimson flood that was spreading over the west.

Salome leant back, dreaming all sorts of pleasant dreams, and Cecil and I chatted together about our plans for Redcar, and how we could accommodate the children. When we arrived at the village Cecil and her bag dismounted, paying sundry hasty visits to the cottage doors, while we waited for her on the road. I guessed what hearty blessings were attending her as she came back to us with emptied bag, her face glowing with happiness. I knew how her heart was warming over the thought of the feverish child refreshed by his orange, the baby crowing for his ball, the grand-dame trying on her cap, the young mother proudly showing off the tiny red boots; such little things in themselves, such small pleasures and thoughtfulnesses, but so lovingly remembered and presented that they won a rich harvest of returned affection for

her own spirit—the good measure pressed down and running over that is poured back into the bosom of the truly charitable.

Passing through the hall on our way upstairs we found some cards on the marble slab, two thin glazed cards, with *Captain Egerton*, — *York Rifles*, printed on them in tiny fanciful letters.

“Did Captain Egerton come alone?” Cecil inquired of the servant.

“Mr. Charles was here as well, ma’am,” the man answered; “he bade me say that he called to inquire after the ladies, but he did not leave a card.”

As Cecil listened for the answer her impatient little fingers tore one of the cards into shreds. When she moved away the morsels fell on to the pavement, and unwittingly she trod them under foot. She had a fidgetty habit of destroying anything of the kind that came in her way. I daresay in this instance she was scarcely conscious of her own action, but the circumstance did not escape me. I

saw the foot placed on the fluttering fragments, and I almost smiled to myself. It seemed to me a clear evidence of the state of her heart. I knew that I should have seen that card differently treated had it borne a name that awoke any feeling of sympathy; as it was,—well, it was almost a pity that Captain Leopold and Captain Leopold's mamma did not know of its fate, if only as a warning!

The next day was Sunday, and in the afternoon at church, before the service began, I saw the old sexton showing two gentlemen into a pew. They were Captain Leopold and his brother. Charlie had been rather in the habit of walking over to Burton church on the Sunday afternoons, and sometimes Susan accompanied him. It was a pleasant walk across the fields, a short cut, not more than three miles, and as the evening service at the church which they usually attended interfered with the dinner, and the rest of the party never went a second time, his coming to Burton was a convenience. But this was the

first time that I had seen Captain Leopold there, and I secretly wondered at his appearance. He looked hot and fatigued by his walk, and went to sleep during the sermon. I could just catch his profile above the pew ledge.

Charlie's delicate face was white and quiet as ever; to be sure it wanted the strength and decision that one generally admires in manhood, but its expression was so sweet and gentle, the features, without being handsome, were so peculiarly refined, his calm grey eyes looked into my own so truthfully and confidentially, that I own he attracted me in a strange manner. As I sat there even then I must confess to a momentary wish that he and Cecil would have liked one another.

Such an idea it was, such a mere vision! for Cecil's untroubled dark eyes were bent on the preacher's face, following his arguments, in all humility taking his preaching home to

her heart. I doubt if she even noticed that the Egertons were in church.

And Charlie had but once, to my knowledge, turned round to look at our pew. It was during the hymn before the sermon, and Salome was leaning a little over the pew-edge, her book balanced on it, one hand keeping the place, the other, with the glove removed from it, pushing away from her flushed cheeks the masses of yellow hair that had escaped from her bonnet, the white strings of which she had untied because of the heat.

I saw his glance fall upon her, I saw his long gaze while a deeper colour came to his face. I saw him look away with an effort, and be apparently engrossed with the singing—and I wondered what he was thinking of! Certainly not of Cecil, who was anxiously wrinkling her heavy forehead as the children sang out of tune.

We were always the last to leave church, and to-day we did not deviate from our usual

course; the Egertons had gone out amongst the first, and it was full five minutes later when the girls and I passed down the aisle.

In the porch Mrs. Anderson, the clergyman's wife, stopped to speak to us, and while Cecil was asking her some questions about the Sunday school, I suddenly remembered my parasol which I had put down on the pew cushion and forgotten, and I went back to look for it.

In returning I noticed a stray prayerbook page lying beneath one of the children's benches, and I picked it up and smoothed its crumpled edges between my fingers. It formed part of the Litany service, and I stood irresolutely looking at it, not knowing what to do with it. Its loss might injure a child's book, yet to leave it where it was was a painful idea to me. The Turks gather up and preserve each shred of paper that comes in their way, for fear the name of Allah should be written on it, and unconsciously be trodden under foot, and from a like



feeling I could not bear that anything so sacred as a prayer should be left there as rubbish, to be perhaps swept into the old sexton's dustpan, and used for fire-lighting.

A little girl was standing below the gallery, staring at me with her fingers in her mouth, and when I asked if it were hers, she enunciated "No-a," with true Yorkshire emphasis. To my further inquiries as to whether she was aware to whom it did belong, or could find an owner, she vouchsafed a second "No-a" equally loud and impressive.

Old Mr. Anderson was coming out of the vestry, and seeing me talking to the child, he came forward and enquired if she had been naughty. I suppose he fancied I was remaining behind to lecture her about inattention or sleepiness during the service.

Little Hannah glanced at me with a half-frightened face, as if she feared I was going to convict her of an imaginary offence, and looked quite relieved, moving off quickly to the door, as I explained that I only wanted

an owner for the soiled page which was still in my hand.

Old Mr. Anderson did not think it was of much value, and he said so; he advised me to leave it on the bench, where if the children did not own it, Stevenson would most likely find it and throw it away. I did not say that this was just what I feared, or, indeed, make any further remark; I knew he was not likely to understand my feeling on the subject, and I contented myself with carefully slipping the page into my pocket as I moved away.

Mr. Anderson asked me if I had seen some curious old paintings, which Stevenson had discovered behind the whitewash on the wall, as he was sweeping it down a day or two ago. When I said I had not, nothing would serve the old gentleman but to take me to see them, and he ambled up the side aisle, and with considerable pride pointed out on the chancel wall an old outline in red and black, wonderfully grotesque and distorted. A good deal of the whitewash had been picked off to discover

more ; Mr. Anderson told me he had been busy with it himself all yesterday afternoon, and even now I saw traces of his work in the untidy bits of lime, and the thick white powder scattered over the unswept flags, while a hammer still lay on the old stone sedilia, just where he might have laid it down when weary, or at dinner time. He went on talking for some time, claiming my attention for the curious figures ; but I could not afford them much admiration, or think that he would be really repaid for his exertions ; a little soap and water, or a hand brush on the floor and in the pews, would have been far more for the benefit of the church.

It was really a disgraceful little building ; square, flat-roofed, with an east window which had lost its tracery ; a heavy gallery blocking up the west-end, and darkening the whole ; long tiers of high pews, a box-like pulpit and reading-desk of painted wood ; some miserable side windows ; an uncared-for chancel, in which were rows of wooden benches for the

schoolboys ; a few old tombs, much disfigured and broken, with here and there bits of handsome stonework and carving, which seemed to testify that at one time or another the building had had fair proportions, and been regarded with more generous pride than was yielded to it now in this enlightened, church-building, church-restoring nineteenth century.

Truly it was painful to see how thickly the dust lay upon everything ; how cobwebbed and stained the windows were, what verdigris was gathering over the metal handles of the pew doors, what an untended, disorderly appearance there was everywhere.

I looked at my companion. He was a short, shrivelled old man, with thin, white hair, and a long, yellow face ; his eyes were small, keen, and sharp, and he spoke with a strong provincial accent. He was very infirm ; as he stood beside me, and leant heavily on his thick stick, his wrinkled hand shook when it pointed out some peculiarity in the

painting. When he preceded me back it was slowly, and with a lame gait; he was very old—perhaps seventy.

Yet he was the only clergyman that we had. Burton was a large and an increasing village. Iron-stone had been found in the neighbourhood, as well as at Redheugh, and the working of the mines had brought a great influx of population to the place—a population, moreover, that needed much care and overlooking. The church was small; it could not have accommodated half the number, had they all attended, but there was no difficulty in that respect, for the congregation was a mere handful.

I had seen there this afternoon some feeble old men and women, who had been church-goers all their lives, and clung to the practice despite the quavering old parson whose voice they could not hear, nor whose sermons understand; a few of Cecil's tenants, who came to please her or from a better motive, the school children, and ourselves.

These made our usual congregation, and a thin and miserable one it was ; while the red-brick meeting-house in the centre of the village regularly poured out a dense crowd of every age and sex as we passed on the Sunday afternoons.

I used to sigh over the church, and sigh over the parson and parish too, and I often wondered that Cecil was not more alive to and troubled by this state of things. But she had always been accustomed to it, she had little hope of its ever being much better ; she had not seen it contrasted with other and more fortunate parishes, and she was scarcely alive to the responsibility of her own position, or the power of usefulness which she wielded by right of that position.

Mr. Phillips had left Burton Abbots the year of Mrs. Claridge's death ; he had now other and much better preferment, and we heard of him as greatly beloved in his new home and doing much good there. We missed him extremely ; the poor scarcely ceased

bewailing his loss, for he had been devoted to their service ; but Burton was a hard field for heart cultivation, more than one labourer could well manage, and no one had stood forward to give him aid, or "God's speed." His own means had been small, his family large, and the population both poor and miserable. He had done the little he could, had materially injured his own health by over exertion, and when he left, at last, he was not so much tempted to do so by the prospect of personal advantage, as in the hope that his place would be filled by another more able and more powerful than himself. And, in his place, came old Mr. Anderson, a worn out servant of the church, who after a lifetime's toiling in curacies was considered to be well pensioned off by the £100 per annum of Burton Abbots. Who gave a thought to his fitness for the place, to the fifteen hundred ignorant, hungry souls, who would be entrusted to his care, to the fifteen hundred surging, turbulent spirits, which would have

baffled the energies of an able and strong man in the pride of life? Poor Mr. Anderson and his rheumatic old wife came to their new home, and complained as the greatest evil of their position, that the parlour fire smoked in a west wind ! They were kind, peaceable old people, they meant well ; he christened all the babies that were brought to him, and read the marriage and burial services as he was requested to do so ; visited the sick if they sent to ask him ; but he was old and infirm, and he could not go from house to house, charging and admonishing, sowing good seed for the kind dews and the warm sun of heaven to nourish ; it was enough, he thought, that he went where he was asked, he did not push himself ; he made himself no enemies ; he was ready to do a kind act whenever he saw an opportunity—perhaps in his younger and abler days he would have sought out that opportunity ! So now he was the Parson of Burton, and vice was springing up strong and uncontrolled, and the place was gaining an



ill name. But it was hardly his fault; he had not strength or energy to cope with the difficulties, hardly sight even to see and avoid them. People blamed Mr. Anderson very mildly, but many spoke bitterly of those who had given him the charge.

He and I came out of the church together, and seeing old Mrs. Anderson and Salome talking by the parsonage gate, we joined them. Charlie Egerton was there too, looking very happy and animated. I asked for Cecil. Salome said that when they missed me, she had supposed that I had gone to enquire after Charlton's sick child, and she had followed me there; had not I seen her? She had said that we would join Salome outside the cottage if she would come there after giving Mrs. Anderson her arm home. I thought no more of the matter until I arrived at Charlton's, and inquiring for Miss Claridge, heard that she had gone home not five minutes before; but whether by the fields or the road the woman could not tell. She had evidently sup-

posed me to have rejoined Salome, and that we should be on before her, and under this impression, was walking to overtake us.

Charlie came along the road with us, talking to Salome and me about many things, and always in such a pleasant spirit and with so much good feeling, that I liked him more and more. I thought of what Cecil had said coming home from Torrehill, and I watched the two as I saw them together. I could not doubt the state of his feelings; he was open and ingenuous, young and trusting. I could see the colour varying in his cheek, the light in his eyes, the reverential attention with which he listened to her slightest remark, and treated her opinions as though they were worthy of all deference and respect. He was endowing her with every possible charm of mind, as well as of form; he was trying to read her heart in the fair features of her face. I did not wonder at him, I knew it was only natural, but I was somehow pained to think that his affection was unreal, that it might be

disappointed. Salome was very charming, no one loved her more than I did, but no one could better tell that she was not what Charlie thought her to be, that she was not quite the person to suit him. She was so weak and loving, so relying on others, so affected by surrounding circumstances, so easily led away, that she would need a strong hand to guide her through life, and to keep her straight. And Charlie too wanted a brave heart to fight with him; his constitutional shyness made him shrink from drawing on himself the observation of others; he was keenly alive to ridicule and satire, easily pained and depressed, his physical weakness seemed in many instances to affect his mind and render him nervous and susceptible. Only his strong sense of right, his high conscientiousness and unswerving principle kept him from deviation from the course of duty. I guessed what a battle he had to brave in his own home, how he would be tried by the worldliness and little minds of his mother and Louie, how

Captain Leopold would aggravate and annoy him ; how hard he would find it to be firm in well-doing, to conform himself to his family and live in peace with them, and yet never to be deterred from the right by fear of mis-construction or ridicule. Had he been a stronger-minded, able man, his larger powers might have influenced them, or at any rate have given weight to his opinions, have inculcated a little wholesome fear, and so afforded him greater liberty ; as it was, weak and often ailing, shy and nervous, he was an easy mark for ridicule ; and besides, they did not like him to be so over-strict, and they tried to tease him out of his opinions ; no one who knew the high foundation on which Charlie's religion was built up, could fear that they would really succeed, but one might well tremble for the effect on his present peace and happiness.

I did not think that he and Salome were suited to one another—she was too volatile ; he would find out that at last, and be pained

by it. Another man would better understand and regulate her character—would trace how, under her gaiety and childishness, there were great elements for good and blessing, and bring these forward.

At the lodge gate we parted, he turning into the fields—we going up the drive. A few seconds later we encountered Captain Leopold. He was walking hurriedly along the road, striking the pebbles out of his way with his stick; his head was rather bent, and he did not see us till we were quite close enough to notice his confused start and wonder at his unusual discomposure.

He would have passed us with scarcely a word, but Salome had a playful remark for him, and thought that he would like to know where he would overtake Charlie. As he answered her with rather a strained attempt at gaiety, I saw how heated and flushed his face was, and noted that his eye dropped on meeting mine. I wondered to meet him there, and asked if he had seen Cecil. He answered

shortly that she was at home, and giving us no opportunity for further remark or question, bowed and left us. I quickened my pace towards home as soon as he was gone, for my woman's brain was working with curiosity.

On reaching the house, I ran upstairs to Cecil's room. The door was bolted, and to my first knock there was no reply. I asked if I might come in, and Cecil withdrew the bolt in silence.

She was standing with her back to the window as I went in, and, bending over the shawl that she was folding, she tried to avert her face. But I had caught a glimpse of a stormy, téar-strained countenance, and heard that her voice was husky with sobs as she somewhat curtly demanded what I wanted.

I came in and sat down. I knew that she could tell me nothing, that she was too proud, and moreover that her code of honour was such she would betray no secret that might be painful to another. I had but one course, and I pursued it. I asked her frankly what had

passed between her and Captain Leopold, for we had met the latter looking very unlike himself, and I gathered that they had walked home together.

Without another word Cecil sank down on her knees by the bedside, sobbing as if her heart would break. I tried to comfort her, and in so doing learnt all. Captain Leopold had proposed, and she had refused him, and now she was reproaching herself for having made him unhappy, believing that her own conduct must have been very far from what it ought to have been, to have instigated his.

"It is such a disgrace to me," the poor girl sobbed out; "he said that I had given him encouragement, and, oh! Mimi, I'm sure I did not mean to do so. I did not even like him; I was always afraid of being rude, and I fancied that he admired Salome if he admired anyone. Oh! it is so humiliating. I shall never dare look any of them in the face again."

Gently I tried to calm her down and make

her listen to my soothing words. I told her how very clear her own conduct had been from blame; how this sort of trial was one very much resulting from her position, and that for that reason, she should meet it bravely, and be unaffected by it. I did not say what I thought, that it would be only the first of many similar annoyances; and I almost smiled to think how different was her reception of this first offer from what would have been the feeling of most young ladies under similar circumstances. But she had none of that despicable feminine vanity which delights to raise itself, no matter if it be at the expense of another's happiness, which takes and toys with the heart's best gifts, knowing well that it can and will give nothing in return. She felt keenly, what is truly the case—that no woman can meet with such an avowal without self-reproach—without regretting that her conduct has given rise to misunderstanding, or else lamenting the pain that she is causing to another. For it is



humiliating to appear heartless to those who love us, to draw back when we have seemed to lure them on to the avowal of their affection; to lower our standard in their eyes, if not in the eyes of the world. I say nothing of higher motives—of the Golden Rule of doing unto others as we would they should do unto us; of the bearing of one another's burdens; where the importance of these Christian motives is keenly felt, there will need no comment on my part. But this I do affirm, that a woman should blush to speak of hopeless passion which she has excited! we are keen enough in our own susceptibilities—we have a gift for seeing far into the hearts of others do not let us abuse it by idle trifling or the indulgence of a miserable little vanity.

Is a woman ever beloved and unaware that she is so? I say rarely, it is almost impossible that she should be so; she traces the spell in the glance of an eye, in the varying colour on a cheek, in the inflection of a tone, in the fluctuation of a pulse, in the burden of

a sigh ; if in nothing else she feels it in her spirit, it may be in the warmth of sympathy, it may be in some cooler sensation to which her own heart makes no response. And as she sees, so she must act ; if she too loves—well ; if not, let her prove that she does not. There is no need for rudeness, no need for unkindness or cruelty, for sarcasm or harsh words ; let her show her feelings by avoidance or coldness ; these will suffice in almost all cases, for a loving heart is very open to signs ; and a man's pride will not willingly subject him to refusals. Would that women only saw how their pride was lowered by the selfish, inconsiderate vanity that they too often indulge ! Would that all, like Cecil, felt it a humiliation to have given rise to hopes which she was unable to realize. But hers was an exceptional case ; I felt it so though she did not. I did not think that Captain Leopold's heart would break for losing her, though his necessities might lead him somewhat bitterly to regret her fortune. I believed that he had

had some little difficulty in winding himself up to the question, that he must have felt uncertain about its answer. I more than half suspected that that little wilful Salome of ours had not crossed his path without flinging some light and shadows on it. But she had no fortune save her face, and he was in debt, and had extravagant habits. It would have been worse than madness for him to have thought of making such a marriage. And Salome herself had been content with the present, like a happy child, and had given no thought to him, nor anyone, not even to Charlie.

Well, I kissed the tears from Cecil's cheeks, and parted the heavy black hair from her forehead. I listened to her description of her walk, how she had thought to rejoin us, and Captain Leopold had overtaken her and gradually worked round the conversation into the channel that he desired; how she had been startled by an avowal of affection the existence of which she had never even suspected; how when she endeavoured to

explain, and he found entreaties and soft words were unavailing, he had tried reproaches and recrimination—how he had warned her of the possible consequences of her refusal, spoken of his despair, and broken heart, and all sorts of nonsense—and she had believed in all and reproached herself and been miserable, yet too highminded to leave him in a moment's doubt as to the state of her feelings and the indifference with which she regarded him.

All that she could do now was to repeat her expressions of sorrow, to review her conduct, and puzzle as to what part of it had been faulty, to make many resolutions of amendment, asking me to help her. Poor, dear child!—I scarcely dared say to her that in this instance at least she had only been sought for her money!

She charged me earnestly not to tell any one, not even Salome. She said to me ere we parted:—

“Such things should not be spoken of, we

were both wrong, and the mistake is creditable to neither. He could not wish it known, and I could not bear to tell it. Don't let it even be mentioned again between us two. I would not have told had you not asked and had a claim to my confidence."

So I went down to our usual Sunday tea, and when she joined us half an hour later, Salome could not guess by her countenance that anything had occurred. Salome did not even notice, as I did, how Cecil winced when she spoke of our meeting with the Captain, and she once again revived the conversation when I had turned it into another channel. But Cecil was busy reading and did not appear to overhear us.

## CHAPTER V.

## CECIL'S CHARGE.

“If sin came by thee,  
And by sin death, the ransom righteousness,  
The heavenly life, and compensative rest  
Shall come by means of thee. . . .  
Be satisfied  
Something thou hast to bear through womanhood—  
Peculiar suffering, answering to the sin ;  
Some pang paid down for each new human life ;  
Some weariness in guarding such a life,  
Some coldness from the guarded. But thy love  
Shall chant its own beatitudes  
After its own life working. A child's kiss  
Set on thy sighing lips shall make thee glad ;  
A poor man served by thee shall make thee rich ;  
A sick man helped by thee shall make thee strong.”

MRS. BARRETT BROWNING

“I love these little people, and it is not a slight thing when  
they, who are so fresh from God, love us.”

DICKENS.

THE next morning the little Evans's met us at  
the station. Their mother had brought them,

and she gave them into Cecil's charge, with many tender words and injunctions.

She was a slight, delicate-looking woman, with small, straight features, and pale blue eyes that had been dimmed by tears. Across her forehead there spread a close network of care-lines; and the corners of her mouth were slightly depressed, and the arched eyebrows gave her face a pained expression.

She kept Edith's hand in hers, patting it softly, fitting the little thread gloves to the fingers.

Cecil had made up a comfortable couch for Ruth at the further end of the carriage, and packed her on to it, folding a shawl over her feet, and finding a cushion for her back. Little Edith was delighted at the prospect of going away from home, and danced merrily about, showing her pleasure in a thousand childish ways, scarcely enduring with patience her mother's long kiss, as the five minutes bell rang, and the porter came to close the carriage door. But Ruth's young brow gained a

shadow as she looked in her mother's face, and detected the trouble there. I saw her glance up hastily, while her lip quivered, and though she said no word, and her parting kiss was very quiet and undemonstrative, I guessed that her little heart was feeling bitterly its first separation from its dear ones.

Poor child ! when Mrs. Evans gave her a parting injunction, "Take care of Edith, Ruth," and the shrill whistle blew, and the train panted past the platform where stood the widowed mother in her rusty black garments, the close cap scarcely whiter than her anxious face, poor Ruth could only murmur, "Yes," in a choked voice, and turn her head away to conceal her tears.

Long afterwards, when Edith was chatting merrily on Cecil's knee, by the further window, looking out and telling of all that they were passing, I saw a round, white drop fall on the wee folded hands which lay listlessly in Ruth's lap. But she cheered up as we got farther from home. Salome was sitting next to her,



and her kind words were very soothing, and the new scenes created an interest for themselves. She gave shy answers at first, and then smiled, and ventured to call our attention to some passing object. Children's sorrows are not very enduring, and soon she was nearly as happy as little Edith.

We did not arrive at Darlington till afternoon, and we had some time to wait there. In those days it was a wretched station, dingy and uncomfortable. We took the children into the waiting room, and they amused themselves with looking through the window on to the platform, while I went in search of tea for them; and Cecil and Salome had a last talk together, standing hand in hand at the opposite window.

The train Salome was to go by would be in presently, and she would have to say good-bye. Justine, with a dressing-case in her hand, was standing outside, listening for the whistle. The train was just entering the station as I came from the refreshment room;

there were noisy cries of "Darnton, Darlington," and the newspaper boy elevated his basket to the windows. The doors were flying open, a crowd of passengers filled the platform, porters rushed past with luggage, and the people called and jostled.

Cecil and Salome were at a carriage door, and a gentleman just descending, politely turned back, and helped them to stow in their packages. Salome put her hands into mine, and raised her cheek to my lips. I kissed her, and fervently said "God bless you," feeling something rising in my throat at the thought of sending her from me alone, this first time since she had been my charge. Cecil was speaking rather loud and harshly, busying herself about a thousand trifles, and giving instructions to Justine. I guessed that she did so to hide her feelings.

We were in plenty of time; after they were in the carriage, and the door was closed, for full five minutes Salome sat by the open window talking to us. She looked very lovely as

she leant forward, with smiling eyes and lips, the rich varying colour on her cheeks, and her long, golden hair all in disorder. One little pink and white hand was drooping over the window-frame, the delicate purple veins showing transparently through the tiny wrist. Cecil stroked it down softly with the end of her parasol.

"Good bye, mind you write to me," she cried in her sweet silvery tones, as the train moved off.

And we said "good bye," and turned away. We were going straight into the waiting room to the children, but in doing so we had to pass the stranger gentleman who had been helping us a moment or two before. He had been looking after the departing train with wistful, earnest eyes, and now he turned his gaze fully upon us. I fancied he gave a slight start, and seemed as though he would have moved forward as Cecil passed him, but she was busy looking down the line, her eyelids growing red and heavy with restrained tears; she did

not notice him, and he turned as if mistaken, and moved rapidly away.

Little Edith was tapping at us through the glass, and we entered the waiting room and found Hannah Harrison, whom we had left in charge, giving the children their tea.

Presently in came the stranger also, a leathern bag in one hand, a canary's cage in the other. He put down the bag and cage on the table, laid beside them a great coat and umbrella, and moving to the mantelpiece began to examine some advertisements that were framed over it. But either the rate of fares to Scarborough, Filey, Whitby and Burlington did not particularly interest him, or he found more amusement in watching our party, for I saw him glancing round towards the table where Ruth was drinking a cup of very hot tea, and little Edith, with a large bun in her hand, was standing upon tiptoe to look at the bird in the cage. Cecil stood erect in the doorway, watching the porters pack the luggage on the top of the Redcar car-

riage. She had a fine figure and she stood in a picturesque attitude. Her profile was turned to us, and the light slanted softly upon it, and on the thick braids of her dark hair; she had removed her glove and one caught the outline of a half-raised, singularly well-formed hand. The stranger looked from the children to her.

The Redcar train was to leave almost immediately, and we were soon packed into one of the carriages. At the very last moment, a porter put in the birdcage, and leathern bag, and the stranger followed him. He took the seat by the door, and I was opposite to him.

We went through the town of Darlington, the children finding ample amusement in looking at the people and houses; then there was a dreary wait at the second station, and Edith, wearied by the delay, slid down from Cecil's knee and began to examine the canary's cage in the opposite seat. The little gloved fingers nearly approached the bright bars, and the frightened bird fluttered from

side to side. Cecil put her hand out to draw the child away, but the stranger interposed :—  
“ Pray let her amuse herself with it, the bird is only afraid of the glove.”

And he addressed the child.

“ Will you take off your glove? You will find then that my little favourite is very friendly.”

Edith put up her hand to Cecil who, with some difficulty, removed the tight thread glove from the little hot fingers. The gentleman found some hempseed and showed her how to hold it between the bars, while the bird picked it from her hand. As he leant forward amusing them so goodnaturedly the sympathies of both children were enlisted; Ruth's face flushed with pleasure, and when she was offered a seed she took it shyly, and gave a little exclamation of delight as the bird came forward to eat it.

We went on our way again, but the children's attention was so occupied in feeding the bird that they had no leisure to notice the country

through which they passed. Only once, much later, as Cecil was commenting on the strange shape of a hill that we were passing, and wondering what it was called, our companion raised his head, and told us how it was Roseberry Topping, one of the prominences of the Cleveland hills. I asked him some questions, and as he answered me, and Cecil added a remark, the conversation became general. He seemed to know the country well, and Cecil, roused by a corresponding interest, questioned him about the neighbouring ironworks and foundries, and he answered well and readily, and gave us a good deal of local information.

He was sitting opposite to me, and I could see him well. He was rather tall and broad made, very gentlemanly in appearance. He was young looking, and his face might even have been considered boyish, but for a quantity of bushy, dark brown whiskers. His features were irregular but very pleasing, the eyes small and greyblue, with long dark lashes. I saw them twinkle, mischievously,

every now and then when Edith made a funny remark. His forehead was rather low, but broad and white, making a curious contrast to his sunburnt cheeks ; his mouth was large, wide, but very good tempered, and disclosing a row of small, even, white teeth. His thick brown hair was inclined to curl, but had been cut closely ; he wore a suit of dark tweed, and in playing with the children had removed one of the usual broad-brimmed seaside hats. Somehow his face seemed familiar to me, and I fancied that, when he spoke, his voice struck a chord in Cecil's memory, for she looked curiously, half eagerly, from me to him. But he did not seem to recognise her in the least now.

We were getting near Redcar. Our companion pointed out Coatham to us, as we passed it, its common spreading before it, and the picturesque new church standing out between the cottages. Cecil had little Edith's glove in her hand, and had been smoothing



the tiny reversed fingers. Now she bade the child come and put it on.

But Edith was looking out through the window at the sea and took no notice.

The stranger touched her shoulder, and said: "Do you hear your mamma speaking to you?"

I almost smiled at the mistake, but little Edith was very indignant; she pulled herself away from the gentleman's hand, and with a little shrug of her shoulders, said pettishly: "Don't—she's not my mamma. My mamma is at home; she's not a bit like her—*she's* only Miss Claridge."

"Miss Claridge!" almost shouted the stranger in his heartiest tone, every feature in his face lighting up with pleasure. "Is it really so? Well, I thought I could not be mistaken, only the children puzzled me. Miss Claridge—Cecil—don't you remember me?"

His real delight was reflected on Cecil's glowing countenance as she grasped his out-

stretched hand and exclaimed: "John Phillips, to be sure; how could I forget you!"

"You puzzled me," he said. "I seemed to remember your face directly I saw it, and was going to speak, but you turned away, and I could not account for the children. But this is a great pleasure; are you coming to Redcar?"

She told him our plans for staying a month there at least, and how Salome had gone to her uncle's, and we had charge of the little Evans's; and he, in return, informed us of the well-being of his family—of the marriage of his youngest sister—how his mother was staying with a widowed daughter—and he had come to spend some time at Redcar in solitude, wishing to get through some hard grave reading, preparatory to being ordained after Christmas.

He and Cecil had many questions to exchange and answer, and they looked so charmed by the meeting that I was glad for both. Besides, I had an interest in the lad

himself; I had loved him as a child; I remembered his long-ago red mittens; his first going to school, and his games with Cecil. I could feel proud to see him grown into such a fine, honest-looking man.

"Little Johnney Phillips! To think that you should be so altered!" Cecil said, laughingly, when there was a pause in the conversation.

"Not more than you are, Cecil," he retaliated. "Why, you have grown quite a handsome woman. And that beautiful girl, to whom I was nearly losing my heart at Darlington, is little Salome Fielding? I should never have guessed it. What have you done with Mrs. Cliff—is she with you?"

"No; she follows us by and by, but only for a few days; she cannot well be spared from Burton. But she is very anxious to come and see Redcar again. She was once here with my mother."

The train was in the station, and there was a good deal of bustle to get the things out and

take the children through the crowd. We left the servants to look after the luggage, and sent off Hannah and the children in a fly to the lodging. Cecil and I preferred to walk, and John came and joined us. An old woman was beside the glass door on the way out, and handed us some cards; he had a hearty word for her in passing, and afterwards explained to us how this was Mrs. Skinner, the proprietress of the Baths and bathing machines—quite a Redcar celebrity.

A good many people had come in the train with us; the road from the station was a very busy scene; the street pavement was crowded, and from every turning on to the sands we came upon groups of nurse-maids and children, armed with baskets and wooden spades. A fresh, clear, salt breeze blew from the sea, and lifted up little heaps of sand and dust from the crevices of the pavement, flinging them right and left. Now a little girl was crying because something had got into her eye; and then again, a maid was emptying a

child's shoe, which had filled with sand, while the child balanced himself unsteadily against her apron. It was about tea time, and many of the open windows showed us family groups gathered round the tables, or children with great hunches of bread and butter in their hands. John pointed out to us Dove's well-known shop, with its piles of bread and buns, and the attendant customers.

Rather more than half way up the long street was our lodging—a tall, yellow-washed house, with dark green frames to the windows and a white doorstep. 'The fly was before it and a railway cart as well, from which the servants were removing the luggage. On the threshold stood a short, stout, white-headed man, the first glance at whose comely, kind face, forced an exclamation of delight from Cecil's lips, and she sprung into his arms and kissed him. "Oh, Mr. Scott! what a pleasure; we did not think to find you here!"

"I wanted it to be a surprise, dear," he said, in a half fond, caressing tone; "I wanted

to know if you would really be pleased to see an old fellow like me. And besides, I quite thought with pleasure of the trip and a visit to you. How do you do, Miss White? you look well; and Cecil too, though perhaps she is grown thinner. But who's this?" and his eye rested on John Phillips and the canary.

"It's John, Mr. Scott, John Phillips, don't you remember him?" and the faintest blush tinted Cecil's cheek as she explained; "little Johnney Phillips whom I used to play with."

Mr. Scott shook him cordially by the hand, and asked after his belongings. We were going into the house, and Cecil invited him to come too. But he declined; his landlady would be looking for him, expecting him to tea; and he bowed, shook hands again with Cecil, and passed on.

We went upstairs into the drawing-room—a pleasant enough apartment with a large bay window at its further end, through the open sash of which came the bracing sea breezes, sweeping aside the white curtains and bang-

ing the door. Cecil hurried to the window and looked out, looked down first on the yard below and the roofs of its outbuildings, into the neighbours' yards and gardens at the side, and then out and beyond to the wide strip of pinkhued sand, and the long reef of seaweed covered rocks that the outgoing tide had left uncovered. Far, far out to sea all was calm and blue and placid, the distance blending sea and sky in one soft hue, only broken by white sails, or the brown outline of some fishing cobbles. The beach was covered with people, figures moving in every direction like black specks; immediately below was a long line of bathing machines, and more to the right, picturesque and gaily painted cobbles carefully secured to the banks, while sailors threaded in and out among them, cleansing and preparing them.

Cecil was in ecstasies, I thought she would be joining little Edith who was capering round and round the room in breathless delight. But we had to go and settle about the

rooms. The one next the drawing-room was to be for me, for I had an objection to long and high stairs, and Cecil wished to have the children near her. She gave them the bedroom looking out to the sea and above the drawing-room, and contented herself with one much smaller that faced the street. She was always very unselfish in these little matters.

We tried hard to persuade Mr. Scott to come and stay with us altogether; we could have accommodated him quite well, but he had taken rooms at the Red Lion and urged his old bachelor habits as an excuse. "I should only be a restraint to you, my dear," he said to Cecil, "you don't know what a fidgety old man I am, and I am not accustomed to children. No, I'll have my own quarters, and come and see you from time to time. If you want anything, or if I can help you in anyway, you must let me know."

Cecil had ordered tea to be prepared as soon as possible, and we were all glad to assemble in the dining-room. Ruth was looking pale



and tired, and Cecil made her lie down on the drawing-room sofa, and herself carried her up a tempting little tray of tea and toast. She kept a place at her right hand for little Edith, and took quite a motherly charge of the child. The high chair had been provided on purpose, and sitting on it Edith complacently swung her bare, mottled legs under the table.

Before tea was over I came to the conclusion that Mr. Scott was right in securing a retreat for himself, for he was not used to children, and had no predilection for them. His eye just caught the evolutions of Edith's stout legs as they swung backwards and forwards with the most aggravating regularity, and I saw that he grew thoroughly fidgeted by the sight; the child slopped over her tea and he gazed in painful abstraction at the stains on the table-cloth. Cecil wiped the little greasy mouth with her handkerchief, and he feebly recommended a napkin and finger-glass. He wanted to talk to Cecil, and she

was so taken up with the child that she only gave him a half attention.

The ironstone mines here had great interest for him, from a similarity in their working to the plan adhered to on the Redheugh property. He had been at Redcar two or three days, and had employed the interval in visits to the different openings. He naturally expected Cecil to be fully as interested in the topic as himself, and he dilated largely on all that he had noticed and fancied might be brought to bear on the different shafts at home. But Cecil was not inclined for work, and only listened to please him, saying "yes" or "no" as they seemed to be called for.

"The men are better managed than ours," he was saying. "I was at Marske yesterday and went over some of the new cottages for the miners that Mr. Pease is building there, they are convenient and well arranged. You must go and see them, Cecil. And they have a capital plan of keeping the houses under a fortnightly supervision, when an over-

seer goes round to enquire into their general cleanliness and good drainage. It is an important matter in such a crowded population and must go far to stave off infectious complaints. I believe—”

But Cecil was asking Edith if she wanted more bread and butter, and the child lifting a sleepy head from a full cup supported by two unsteady hands, drew a sobbing breath which meant “no thank you,” and after being assisted to replace the cup, stretched out the dirty paws to be wiped and leant back against Cecil’s shoulder.

I recommended *bed*, in spite of the backs of the little hands being immediately applied to the eyelids, which after a vigorous rubbing, were declared to be “quite awake.” But the rosy mouth gaped over the words, the wide awake eyes were screwed up till they only showed a line of eyelash, and there followed a very significant and telltale yawn.

Cecil lifted the child from her chair and carried her off in her arms to Bedfordshire.

Even Mr. Scott could not resist that true picture of happy womanhood, the sweet gentleness on Cecil's sallow face as it drooped over the child's curly head; the tender clasp of her slender white hands round the little form. I saw his mouth relax as she went past him, and meeting my eye we both smiled.

"How fond she is of children," he said quietly as the door closed.

I answered "yes, very, and is it not a wholesome and pleasant liking? Is it not a good sign of any spirit when little children's tastes and feelings are in unison with it? Surely it argues for some little resemblance between the two; some sympathy, some alike innocence, or simplicity or confidence, for a childlike contented nature?"

"I should not have said that Cecil's was a childlike nature," Mr. Scott remarked rather shortly.

"Don't you think so?" I said. "Now it seems to me that every year which passes

makes her mind younger in thought and feeling. She never had a childhood, as one may say, she was more of a woman of mind and opinions when I first came to her than she is now. But her humility is so great and increasing, and she keeps her own heart so carefully and conscientiously to the right, checking every doubtful thought and evil tendency, that in the Holy Teaching to which she commits herself she regains a pure and childlike spirit; she learns obedience and dependence and submission."

"I do not think I quite understand her yet, Miss White. If I had been questioned I should have said that she appeared very reserved and undemonstrative, though I might have suspected that she was naturally rather proud and passionate. She and I have always been great friends, but I speak of how she would appear to casual observers."

"They wrong her then," I said hotly, "or perhaps it is partly her own fault, for she will not let her true self be known. She is proud

and passionate, to what a degree you can have no conception who have not seen her roused, but it seems to me the most beautiful part of her character that she is able to keep that stormy nature so perfectly in control, that it is undetected, only guessed at by those around her. Believe me, it is the very consciousness of that natural warmth and impetuosity which makes her invest herself with cold reserve. In the fear of betraying too much she often runs the risk of being accounted heartless."

"Poor Cecil," Mr. Scott murmured, and for the first time in my hearing he reverted to her mother. He said in a low voice Cecil sometimes reminded him of her.

"Only no one could doubt *her* passionate nature," he continued, "you read it in the fire in her eyes and the variations in her voice. She had a rich, rare, loving nature, but it was abused." Even after all those years he did not allude to the past without a betrayal of feeling.

The pause that ensued was long and painful, unbroken until I proposed going to look for Cecil, who had said she would come out for a walk on the sands. I found her in the children's room, Ruth already in bed, and little Edith kneeling in her little white night-gown from which the bare rosy feet protruded, Cecil holding her folded hands while she repeated her evening prayer, asked God to "bless Mamma, little sisters and brothers, and make her a good girl, for Christ's sake. Amen."

I waited till it was finished and Cecil had put her beside Ruth, and kissed them both, then Hannah left in charge, we went to get our things on.

## CHAPTER VI.

JOHN PHILLIPS.

"No hero—only a good man."

As we passed down Bath street on our way to the sands we encountered John Phillips. He too was going out, and he joined us. He and Cecil walked on a little in front, and Mr. Scott followed. I never liked to walk fast, and I found the loose sand disagreeable and heavy. But it was very pleasant when we reached the margin of the sea, the tide had turned and was coming in with a fresh keen breeze, the sand was firm and dry, marked



here and there with little ripples from the waves that had passed over it.

We walked in the Marske direction, and left the throng of people behind us. A yellow light was falling on Huntcliff point, meeting a deep shadow at the side of the rock from which the white cottages at Saltburn stood out conspicuously. The coast line looked very picturesque, with its many shaped hills and their varied colours, the distant, red and green, the nearer, pale yellow and half covered with rushes. The sea was rather rough, the tide coming in in overlapping waves edged with foam, which rippled noisily among the wreck and sea coal, bearing treasures away in its retreat for the next wave to fling further on to the shore.

The sinking sun reflected itself on the wet sand in golden and crimson lines, lighting the foam with prismatic colours, picturing a thousand sunsets in the long shallow pools where the bare-legged fishing girls were shrimping. We stood and watched these last for some

time; they seemed to guide their nets with such great ease and precision; they looked so picturesque with their red and blue petticoats and the scarlet handkerchief bound over their heads.

Cecil and her companion walked on and on; at first they had often turned to attract our attention to some point of view, the spire of Marske church, the white castellated house on the cliff, the trail of green or deep blue over the distant sea; now they seemed busied in their own conversation, intent on recalling old scenes, and pleasures, and interests that they had shared together as children.

Mr. Scott and I walked behind in almost silence. We had passed the salmon nets, and seeing our charge turn in the distance were waiting for them.

Mr. Scott drew letters on the sand with the point of his stick. I watched the two figures advancing towards us. Our thoughts must have been somewhat similar, for when he

asked me about young Phillips' prospects, I spoke what was passing in my mind at the moment.

"He is going into the church, and hopes to be ordained at Christmas. Yes, he is four-and-twenty, more than three years older than Cecil. They were great friends as children, and I used to think he had a nice disposition. As a little child he had not good health, but he seems to have quite outgrown his delicacy. He was always quick and clever, and I believe he has done well at college."

"His father was very popular at Burton if I remember right?"

"Extremely so, the people regretted him very much. His son reminds me of him in face."

"This is the youngest son, is it not?"

"Yes, considerably the youngest of the family. All the daughters are married and the sons are out in the world. One is in the church and has a good living near Exeter,

another has a civil appointment in India, and a third is in the navy. They are a clever family and have got on well."

"This young man has a good countenance, and his manner is pleasing. I believe I know some Cambridge men who can tell us of his standing there. I always think a man's position and associates at College are a good criterion of his character. But of course he can have no fortune or anything."

I said nothing in reply, seeing how Mr. Scott's fancy was leading him into the future. I kept my eye on the two who were still some way off.

Mr. Scott went on: "Cecil will be of age on the 9th of September, and she will then come into a large fortune—a very large fortune. The Burton Abbots property is considerable, and in addition there is this Redheugh estate, and the ironworks on both. She comes at once into possession of the Burton property, the Redheugh must be held in trust so long as her father continues in his present

state. But you understand, Miss White, that she will be an heiress, and will be sought for on that account. It must be our part to guard her from falling into evil hands, to prevent her sharing her mother's fate."

I said "Yes," very low and earnestly.

"I used to think the great matter would be to marry her to one who was her equal in point of possession. I fancied that might shield her from mere fortune hunters. But I am not sure now; money need be no obstacle if the person be really attached to her, and his character and position are all that we could desire. I would never raise an obstacle if I thought she were marrying one who was suited to her, and who would make her happy. But I hope she will not be rash, that she will not allow her affections to be engaged until she has seen more of the world, and is quite sure that she knows her own mind. I blame myself that she has mixed so little in society hitherto."

"Surely not," I said, "for that was her

own doing ; she objected so very much to going out alone, and made it a particular request that we would let her delay any real introduction until Salome was old enough to come out too. Now that Salome is seventeen, and we have settled that the girls are to spend next season in town under Lady Armitage's chaperonage, I do not see what we can do more."

"I saw Lady Armitage last week," Mr. Scott said, "and she was urging me to let her take them to the York balls in November. I believe such a thing is considered quite the proper *coming out* for young ladies, and I promised to mention it to Cecil. I own I regret this has not been done sooner, but, as you say, it was Cecil's own fancy, and perhaps it was as well that she should have a little experience before she faced the world. If she mentions the matter to you, do urge her to go to this hunt ball with Lady Armitage."

"Certainly," I said, "but I think she will do it at any rate for Salome's sake. Salome is very fond of a little gaiety," and I began

to inquire what sort of a person Lady Armitage was.

Mr. Scott was not sure, she seemed to him very lady-like and quiet, and was in good society, decidedly a popular person. As Cecil's nearest relative (and even this connexion was distant), she had a claim on her, and seemed in every respect best calculated to introduce her into society. She was herself anxious for the office, and no great wonder, for it is not every chaperone who has charge of two young ladies, one a great fortune and the other beautiful enough to create a *furor* during a London season.

But Cecil and John came up and joined us. We walked home together and the conversation was general. John Phillips had a peculiarly frank and easy manner, and great facility in conversation. He was well read, and had besides plenty of observation; he and Mr. Scott got on beautifully, and Cecil was free and unrestrained with both. She came out in her best light when thus meeting and

harmonising with genial minds. Everything John said was to the point and grounded on high principles, and she seemed instinctively to understand and appreciate his meaning. Her eyes grew bright and her voice softened ; she had not, as so often in society, to fight for the right, and when she was sure of the good guidance of those around her she naturally bent and asked for their explanations and teaching. For once her child-like spirit shone forth happily and evidently. Mr. Scott smiled to me, and whispered that he was at last beginning to know what I meant.

Usually Cecil laboured under a disadvantage. She had firm unswerving notions about her duty, and like many young people she thought they must be carried out regardless of surrounding circumstances. At whatever pain to herself she spoke the truth, and expressed her real opinion without hesitation ; she did not know that secret of real influence, how truth is often more effectual when insinuated than when expressed, and that Chris-



tian charity is permitted to soften many a stern reprimand. If we would show our disapprobation of surrounding things we had better do so by steady, silent avoidance, by making our lives a contrary illustration, than if by arguing strongly and noisily against the practices that we condemn. And when we wish our teaching to be borne in mind and applied, we must instil it with gentle words and evident interest and affection. Cecil expected too much of the world yet; when she had been frequently disappointed she would take, not a lower but more just standard; when she had failed oftener herself she would expect less from others.

We had a very pleasant walk home afterwards. I liked to hear John's hearty merriment, and his genial happy way of treating things and people; it was a pleasure to see Cecil's heavy face relaxing into smiles, and to notice how, after many attempts to be grave and argue out the matter, she gave way and was the first to turn the joke home on herself.

We had outstayed most of the people on the sands, only a few figures were dotted here and there, and twilight was beginning to gather over the scene. One by one lights glimmered from the windows of the village, the last red streak faded from the sky and a pale grey hue succeeded. The outlines of the church and the houses rose up gauntly before us, and the breeze blew with additional coolness against our faces. We said at last that we must go in, and the gentlemen saw us to the door.

John was wishing Cecil good night when Mr. Scott found an opportunity to say to me :—

“ I’ll tell you what, Miss White, that’s an uncommonly nice young fellow. I’ll find out all about him.”

Cecil ran up the stairs before me. The unlighted candles were on the drawing room table and the window, still open, admitted a cold draught. She closed it and struck a match. As she gave me a candle and the light fell back on her face, I was surprised to

see how her sallow cheeks were glowing with crimson. She looked quite handsome, but I scarcely knew whether or not to attribute the improvement to sea air.

I took my bonnet off and came back again; but Cecil was so long in joining me that at last, in despair, I went upstairs to look after her. Her own room was empty, the door wide open, her hat and shawl flung on the bed. I heard voices in the children's room and softly turned the handle of the door.

Cecil was sitting on the bed, her dark hair all disordered and hanging in heavy masses over her shoulders; and clasped close to her breast, the little white face hid on her shoulder, was Ruth Evans. The child was sobbing bitterly as she clung to her, and Cecil was comforting her. They believed that they were alone and Cecil's voice was so soft and gentle that I could scarcely recognise it.

Fast asleep, with her curly head pressed on the pillow, the eyelashes folded on the cheek,

lay little Edith. She had been wearied out and fallen to rest immediately, but I gathered that poor Ruth had been too excited to sleep, and when Hannah left them at supper-time, the strange place and the silence had frightened her. She had called, but no one had answered her; she had been so wretched and miserable and she did so want "Mamma, oh, might she go back to Mamma—Mamma!"

Truly there is a natural, womanly instinct which glories in comforting. I should not have thought Cecil could have spoken as she did, or so motherlike have soothed the child in her arms, calming her fears and stroking down her poor quivering limbs with those soft, white hands of hers.

The candlelight fell on them both; on the restless excited child and the woman so strong and grand in her power of rest; the large calm heart which in trouble and trial stills its own pulses to bring comfort and quiet to others. I watched them in admiring curiosity. There was Cecil, whom I had

counted almost as a child, dealing forth a woman's highest and sweetest privilege. She brought forth no clever arguments to explain to the child the foolishness of her conduct, she did not reason with her, she did not even employ words, she only used the woman's soothing gift, she made her sympathy and tenderness be felt, and thus dissipated the cloud.

"You shall never be left another night," she promised, "and see if you will try and go quietly back into bed, I will come and sleep here beside you—will that make you happier? Then, let me wipe those poor red eyes. How do you manage at home? Are you never left there, Ruth?"

Ruth sobbed and lifted up her heavy, aching head:—

"Not really left. I sleep with Mamma in the room opposite the drawing-room, and until she comes to bed she leaves the door open and I can see her shadow falling on the wall as she sits at work by the table. I don't

care so long as I can feel that she is there, and can see her when I lie awake. I know that if I call she will come directly, and I go to sleep happy because I am safe. Will you really come and sleep here? Oh, how kind of you!"

Cecil promised again, and in the meantime rose to ring the bell for Hannah. As she moved she caught sight of me standing in the doorway, and she smiled.

The child was safely tucked into bed again; the light shaded from her eyes; Cecil told Hannah to wait in the room with a book till she came to bed, and then we left Ruth with a kiss on her lips.

Cecil and I went down stairs together, her arm through mine.

We did not speak for some time after we were in the drawing-room; we had dispensed with candles and were sitting on the sofa by the open window, listening to the low murmuring of the sea.

"You are very silent, Cecil dear," I said at last.

"Am I? I was thinking. Did you hear what little Ruth said was the reason she was not frightened at home, Mimi?"

"Yes, you mean that she saw her mother's shadow on the wall, and the consciousness of her presence gave her a feeling of rest and safety."

"Just so; now do you know I was thinking what a beautiful lesson that teaches us in a higher sense. How the little child's security in her mother's shadow should lead us to remember God's presence, unseen by mortal eyes, but traceable in shadowed goodness and loving kindness. When we are in doubt and trouble and perplexity, we may still see His shadow on the trials—the stamp of His providence. I shall like to remember it when the terror of a Night in Life comes upon me."

"It is a beautiful thought," I said, "com-

fort coming to the child's heart from a flickering shadow on the wall,—the reflection of what it knows to bring safety and protection—a mother's shadow. And you apply it to something better and purer, and more comforting still—to the Father-wings of God, which are ever over and above us. We can sometimes fancy that we see the shadowed outline of these falling across our path now—don't you think so, Cecil?"

She assented, half dreamily; the poetry of the fancy pleased her, but I hardly think she realized its full meaning. It takes a great deal of trial and sorrow before holy tears purify our gaze from the earth dust that is obstructing it, before we look straight upward and see God keeping watch over us, before we can rest safely in sight of His shadow on our life. And Cecil had not known real trouble yet.



## CHAPTER VII.

## A NEW ACQUAINTANCE.

"If thou hast *pass'd* an aching heart,  
 Turn back a little way,  
 Let not 'thy giving' be a part  
 To act another day.

\* \* \* \* \*

"It is not far the feet can go—  
 The shadow cometh fast ;  
 And whether we move fast or slow,  
 'Tis to one bourne at last.

When thy 'to-morrows' all have died,  
 Kind actions will appear  
 Like angels waiting at thy side,  
 To bless thee and to cheer."

CHARLES SWAIN.

"Measure not men by Sundays, without regarding what they  
 do all the week after."

FULLER.

SUNDAY came, and we went in the morning to  
 the Parish Church. We were somewhat late

in arriving ; the service had just been commenced, and the pew-opener hastily showed us into a pew by the door. . It had but one occupant—a youth of apparently one or two-and-twenty, who had a singularly handsome and intelligent face. He was very dark, with clear, brown eyes of beautiful shape and colour, fine features, and a tall, upright carriage. He was not a person that you could pass without remark, albeit there was a certain something in his dress or deportment that struck one as being not altogether in good style. One could account for it by supposing him a foreigner ; yes, as I sat beside him I made up my mind that he was a foreigner ; the little, curled, black moustache on the upper lip, the fashion of the small collar, which left the throat exposed ; the make and fit of his clothes were decidedly un-English. But the *Venite* was sung and he joined in it with a splendid, well-cultivated voice, and his accent was perfectly correct. He made the responses in clear tones, and without a shadow

of mal-pronunciation. I felt rather puzzled as I looked at him. He was quite a stranger to me, and I had flattered myself that in the few days which had elapsed since our arrival, I had passed almost all the inhabitants and visitors in review, and drawn my conclusions about each one. It had been an amusement to Cecil and me to comment on our neighbours, and in the natural ignorance of names we had substituted cognomens of our own, each suggested by something in either the appearance or manner of the parties. For instance, just before us was the mushroom family, for once without the huge round hats, which had decided their classification; that lady a little further on, and apparently devoid of crinoline, we had named the weasel.

Little Ruth was at church with us—she was passionately fond of music, and I saw her turn round eagerly at the sound of the stranger's beautiful voice, and listen with breathless interest, her pale blue eyes never swerving from his face. Higher and clearer

rose his notes, sinking with a sweet low cadence; the child never moved a muscle, her hand was half raised, her lips half parted, her whole soul seemed in the music.

It was too much for her at last; her eyes filled; the poor little sensitive heart was overpowered, and tears coursed each other thickly down her thin cheeks.

At this juncture, the stranger, for the first time, appeared to notice her. I saw a slight smile cross his face, not a smile of amusement, but as it were something deeper and holier, drawn by some instinctive perception of her feeling. Perhaps he could remember having felt a like emotion himself. Be that as it may, he met little Ruth's eye, and the very kindness in his glance drove back her tears. She did not like to be seen crying—it looked babyish, and her handkerchief was drawn forth stealthily, and the tears wiped away. When she looked up again, she could smile too, and as he offered to let her look over his book, she shyly, but with a glad face,

crept to his side, and put out her wee, thin hand to help to hold it.

It was a curious commencement for a friendship, but it was a happy one. The young man's interest seemed greatly roused by the sickly child. It was not long before he had found her a high footstool for her feet, and seemed to take thoughtful pains to make her comfortable. I rather took a fancy to him when he was so kind and good-natured, and certainly I thought he was very handsome. I could not help looking at, and admiring him. Still there was something foppish about him that I did not like ; his fingers were covered with rings, and he had a quantity of glittering chains and things about him, smart studs, and a large breast-pin ; and once or twice he pulled up his collar and touched his cravat, as though he were conscious of their being unusually smart and nice. I fancied that he might be aware of being unusually good-looking himself, but the personal vanity was hardly so obvious.

We lost sight of him when service was over, for he went out of church amongst the first, and we stayed till nearly the last. Mr. Scott had been sitting in another part of the building, and he joined us in coming out, and walked home with us.

As we were sitting at early dinner, I remarked to Cecil how very handsome our neighbour of the morning was. She had not particularly observed him, having sat at the further end of the pew, but little Ruth looked up with a glowing face.

“And didn’t he sing beautifully?”

I said, “Yes, very well,” and I wondered who he was.

“I know his name,” Ruth said, “I saw it at the beginning of his hymn-book—he is ‘George R. Vivian.’”

“Vivian, I wonder what Vivian. I used to know a family of the name; but this youth could not belong to them. They had no young people, and I never heard of nephews

or cousins. Perhaps the list will tell us where he comes from."

We looked in the list of company when we went upstairs, and Ruth joyfully pounced upon the name. But could it be the same? The list told of Captain Vivian, of Westgarth, and by the number we recognised an old, decrepit-looking man, who lodged in a white house opposite, and went out daily in a pretty little phaeton, drawn by a pair of grey ponies. They were skittish little animals, and their owner seemed scarcely able to keep them in control. He was apparently weak and feeble, and the smart footman, who half lifted him into his place, always sat beside him, ready to hold and guide the reins. The children had often amused themselves with watching the party, and took an especial interest in a couple of handsome skye terriers, which made part of the daily cavalcade.

My room faced the low, white house, looked straight upon its long French windows

and the balcony over the door, where almost all day long the invalid sat, wrapped up in shawls, in an arm-chair, the two dogs invariably beside him. Often, as I did my hair, or dressed in the evening, I watched him playing with them, and at first with a good deal of interest and compassion.

He was a wretched-looking man, and he seemed to have no friends or amusement; very rarely did I see even a newspaper in his hand, his one only solace seemed to consist in petting the dogs, and teaching them tricks. But yesterday afternoon my indignation had been aroused by his flogging one of them in a most inhuman manner. I had taken a dislike to him in consequence, and when Ruth suggested that the young man might belong to our opposite neighbour, I did devoutly exclaim :—

“ I hope not.”

“ Why, Mimi,” Cecil said merrily, “ one would think you owed a particular grudge to



that unfortunate man, you speak of him with so much bitterness. And you have veered round like a weathercock, for not three days ago you were always pitying him."

We had Mr. Scott to see us in the course of the afternoon, and Mr. Scott had a few words for my private ear; he had heard from *so and so*, who knew young Phillips well, and mentioned him in the most glowing terms; he was so steady and well principled, and withal so popular and generally respected. Wharton said too that he was considered very clever, and had distinguished himself at college, and he repeated what we already knew about his intention of being ordained after Christmas.

Mr. Scott passed me the closely written letter, and as I sat enjoying its pleasant contents, he stood beside me, rubbing his hands with delight and approbation. Good old man, what a castle he must have reared in his own mind? I feared that his wishes were

going too far, and that if too openly expressed they might defeat themselves, I said cautiously,

"I am delighted to hear this for the young man's own sake ; his future depends so greatly on his disposition and conduct."

"Oh! we'll make his future, never fear," the old man said, with a merry twinkle in his eyes which insinuated a great deal.

I both looked and felt grave. "If you have any wishes pray do not let them be apparent to Cecil," I said, hastily, "she would be the first to shrink and draw back if she fancied we were acting with design, or purposely throwing her on John Phillips' society. I know her well; she is keenly sensitive on these points, and she has a very modest opinion of her own attractions. We have no reason as yet to suspect any thing, you know."

"Not reason to suspect that they care for one another!" Mr. Scott said, sharply; "then how do you account for the evident pleasure

they find in one another's society. Why are they always together, always meeting—why are they? But I won't argue with you—you are so dense! I beg your pardon, you women are so long in seeing things."

I did not say that I thought he misjudged the sex, but I own I could not draw conclusions from the facts that he found all sufficient. As to being much together, I am sure on almost all the occasions to which he referred, Mr. Scott and I had had a second *tête-à-tête*, and thought nothing of it; but then we were middle aged, not to say old people, and that might make a difference.

Cecil went to sit out on the sands and read, and she took the children with her. Mr. Scott and I joined them later in the afternoon, and he gave me a very significant glance when we came upon the trio seated in a boat, and found beside them John Phillips, in whose hand was a small copy of the *Christian Year*, belonging to Cecil, which had apparently afforded the last topic of conversation.

John jumped up as he suddenly perceived us and offered me his place. There was not the slightest shadow or confusion on his face, but a rapid glance showed me that the hot blood was mounting to my darling's brow, deepening even more painfully as little Edith pushed me away with her small hands, and said crossly. "We don't want you, go away, this is our house!"

"Hush, hush! don't be rude, I am shocked," Cecil said to the child, as she drew her towards her, and she bent her head so low in speaking to her that I could no longer trace the variations of her colour.

"I did not see you at church this morning, Mr. Phillips," Mr. Scott remarked.

"No, I generally go to Coatham; the one church is as near my lodgings as the other, and the service is so extremely well done there. It is a beautiful little building, I have been trying to persuade Miss Claridge to go there this evening."

"Oh! yes, Mimi," Cecil said, "do you

mind coming?" and she hesitated, after half pronouncing John Phillips' name and substituted the Mr. Phillips for *John*. "Mr. Phillips says the music is so good; they have no organ or anything, but the school-children sing the chants and hymns most beautifully?"

I agreed, and we arranged to go together. Mr. Scott would not desert the parish church, and argued a little with us on the impropriety of our doing so. We had to return for the children's tea, but we took a short walk on the sands before going in, poor little lame Ruth waiting patiently for us in the boat. She had begged no one to stay with her, we should always be in sight, and she said she was not a bit frightened, so we walked on together in a long line down the sands.

We were not away half an hour, but in returning Cecil remarked to me that surely there were some figures in the boat beside Ruth. I am rather short sighted, but I strained my eyes, and I did fancy that I saw some dark objects clustered together. Cecil

and John hurried on to see what was the matter, and when Mr. Scott and I came up to the boat we found poor little Ruth sobbing in Cecil's arms, while John Phillips was exchanging some sharp words with a sour-faced fisherman, whose boat it appeared we had invaded, very much to his dissatisfaction.

And close to Cecil and little Ruth was our handsome friend of the morning, speaking to both in clear musical tones, good humouredly bent on soothing the latter. John Phillips lifted up Ruth to carry her home, for she was so nervous after her fright that she was unable to walk even that short distance, and Cecil explained to me what had occurred. It seemed that after we had left Ruth, the fisherman had come and angrily desired the child to get out of his boat, and terror depriving her of the power of speech she had been unable to comply with his demand, or to explain the reason of her not doing so. He thought she was obstinate, and had used threatening language, when poor Ruth had burst into a

violent fit of crying, which attracted the attention of the gentleman, who was passing, and brought him to the rescue. He had been very kind to her, Ruth said, and she looked gratefully at him through her tearful eyes and gave him a shy, half smile.

I liked his manner of answering her, and calling her his little friend; there was something very taking about his handsome, open face, and the rare, rich smile which lighted it. John Phillips was speaking to him, as to an acquaintance, and now turned round to Cecil.

"I hardly know whether I ought to make any further introduction," he said, "or if you consider that Miss Ruth has done that already. If not; allow me—Mr. Vivian, Miss Claridge, Miss White—Mr. Scott, Mr. Vivian."

We exchanged bows and entered into conversation. Our new friend had plenty to say for himself, and said it well; but from time to time I fancied his remarks were slightly tinged with self consciousness, with what one calls *bumptiousness* in youths of his age, a lit-

the transparent vanity overlaying his character and somewhat detracting from the good impression he otherwise would have made.

He accompanied us to the door, and then, crossing the road, I saw him enter the white house opposite. John Phillips came in with us, and I began to make inquiries about his friend.

"I knew him at Cambridge," John answered me, "and I like him uncommonly. There is a fund of real, sterling goodness in him, and he is very clever. He will not pass through the world without observation; he ought to make a great man, for assuredly he has the elements of one. He has had as much chance of spoiling as most youths; his father, Captain Vivian, is immensely rich, and has a splendid place in Scotland. I dare say you will have noticed him, he lodges opposite and is a great invalid."

"And drives a pair of handsome grey ponies?" asked Cecil.

"Yes," John said, "that is he. But I



don't fancy he and his son get on particularly well together. George rarely mentions his father, and there are unpleasant stories told about him. I did not know George was coming here; I think he'll find it rather stupid, for he tells me he is to remain some time. It was a lucky thing I had an opportunity to give him an introduction to you, he knows no one here, and he really is a nice fellow."

"He is remarkably handsome," Cecil said.

John laughed. "I was sure that recommendation would not escape a lady; yes, isn't he? His mother was an Italian, I have heard, connected with the stage, and his rarely beautiful voice rather corroborates the report. I have never heard him mention her beyond saying that she died when he was a child. He was brought up at one of the German colleges, his father having lived abroad before coming in for this fortune through the death of a distant relative, and he has contracted many foreign tastes and interests. But he is in our set at college, and very popular with us

all. I think you will like him when you come to know him, there is so much practical goodness about him."

"Isn't he rather conceited?" I ventured to ask.

"Well, perhaps; I can't say he is without his share of vanity, those good looking fellows rarely are. But his is on the surface only; the more disagreeable for his friends, but perhaps the less hurtful for himself; he shows that he knows he is good looking, and that he likes to be thought so, and cares a good deal about his dress and appearance. But if one went deep down into his heart, I am sure one would find genuine humility with regard to more important things. He has a very lowly opinion of his own powers and efforts; no one could strive more earnestly and unweariedly after the right than he does—I have seen him pass a good deal of temptation and come unscathed from the ordeal, face and overcome trials before which a much stronger spirit would have quailed. You will like

him much better when you know him as he is, than you can do if you take him as he seems, which is more than one can say of most people."

"You are a good champion for your friend," I said.

Cecil was looking thoughtful and pursued:

"But do you think that failings are less dangerous for being evident?"

"I think so," John answered, "don't you? In that case they attract observation, and if annoying to the world provoke censure and remark, often in a manner that is very painful to their owner, though at the same time may be useful in making him wish for the correction of what leads to such disagreeable results. People revenge themselves on what vexes them; there is not enough charity in society to restrain blow for blow, and unkindness for unkindness, and even in lesser failings ridicule finds its mark, and injured feelings cry out in retaliation. Besides, we must be aware of the failing when every one else re-

marks it, and if we are earnest in our *self-direction* we shall be quite ready to avail ourselves of every hint for the formation of our characters and the correction of what is wanting in our disposition. Our hardest strife is almost always with our secret faults, those specious failings which too often assume an appearance of goodness, and are perhaps ranked as merits by our friends who cannot read the motives which instigate our conduct. But I must be wearying you by so freely giving my opinion on subjects which I dare say you know more about than I do myself."

We persuaded John to stay for tea, and afterwards to accompany us to Coatham church. It was a soft, balmy evening, and the cool air fanned our cheeks, and the small gardens before the Coatham houses sent forth delicious scents to meet us as we walked along the road.

We were very early in arriving, and walked round the grave yard before entering

the church. What a still quiet place it was, how peacefully the dead seemed to rest there ! The graves were far apart, and their neatness and flower-decked borders told eloquently of the human love which hid its memories there.

And the yellow sun slanted on the grass, and the birds twittered and sang : we all with one accord lowered our voices as we passed round.

The bell was ringing and we went into the church. We appropriated one of the seats marked for "strangers," and watched as the congregation gathered till there was not a sitting unoccupied. We were just by the font ; the large metal dove seemed to be soaring over our heads ; and opposite to us was a small window of painted glass representing two of the Evangelists, and a curious emblem of the Holy Trinity.

For its size, there are perhaps few churches so beautiful as this little building by the sea, and I saw that Cecil, who had rarely seen anything of the kind, was regarding it with

eager and admiring eyes. Was she, as well as I, contrasting it with our miserable church at Burton?

The service was admirably performed, with much real feeling and solemnity; and the serious aspect of the congregation, the exquisite reverence and harmony of the choir, went far to keep alive in our hearts a consciousness of our occupation and the PRESENCE around us. I remember the sermon as if I had heard it yesterday—it was short, but, oh, how impressive and heart-stirring! I saw Cecil's varying cheeks and parted lips. I marked the anxiety and breathlessness with which she listened, and I read too and interpreted the dawns of true prayer in her spirit.

She pressed my hand as we were coming out of church, and murmured softly, "We will come here again," and I said "yes," with all my heart.

Just at the doorway as we were passing out was a woman's figure, which moved aside to give us place. Mr. Vivian was immediately

behind us, and John Phillips at our side. The woman was dressed in deep mourning and had a thick veil over her face. I had remarked her once before. It was when she sat in the stall immediately behind us, during the sermon. She had never raised her veil; but some word of the preacher visibly affected her, for I saw her lift her white handkerchief to her eyes, and caught such a long, deep-drawn breath—almost a sob! I had looked at her mourning garments, and surmised that she was in trouble.

Now she came out after us, and when we paused by the lich-gate and were looking at the crimson flood in the west, she stood motionless beside us. I gazed at her curiously. She was very tall and slight; and as her back was turned towards us, the outline of the falling shoulders and graceful figure spoke of extreme youth. But when she turned round, holding her Prayer Book in one hand while she picked up her falling parasol with the other, I noticed a little line of bared wrist

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between the shawl and the black kid glove, and it was so brown, and thin, and wrinkled.

Mr. Vivian had seen her drop her parasol, and darted forward to pick it up ; but she was before him—their hands just brushed together, his glossy brown hair almost came in contact with her veil. She seemed startled to be so helped and drew hastily—almost ungraciously—away from him. Yet ere she had gone two steps further, she turned round and stood before him in the path : “ Thank you,” she said, in a clear, sweet voice, her tall figure at the same time inclining gracefully, “ I thank you, sir.”

She had gone before we could recover from our surprise ; mingling with the crowd she was lost from our sight, and some one having suggested a walk on the shore, we passed to the further end of the village, and crossing the bridge and loose sand, paced along the beach in the direction of the Tce’s mouth.

Many turns backwards and forwards we took in that pleasant twilight. For some



time Mr. Vivian remained with us, but as the little carriage, drawn by its sprightly pair of greys, came unexpectedly in sight, he wished us good evening and went to meet it; and John Phillips and Cecil and I walked on together, reviewing, in pleasant converse, the events of the day, and the points of the sermon we had just heard; he telling us many heart-warming anecdotes of the parish work going on in that little village, and the church guidance which hedged in and blessed its people.

He and Cecil had the conversation between them for the most part, for I had little inclination for talking then, and besides, I dearly loved to hear them speak out their fresh young thoughts and feelings. No matter that the halo with which their fancies invested life was somewhat unreal; that their standards of right and wrong seemed to my older heart a little exaggerated. I did not check them; I did not even tell them that Life was not what they imagined; but I left the Future

to teach its own lessons—to bring home its realities and blight their day dreams in its own time.

George Vivian had taken the servant's place beside his father, and again and again the little pony carriage passed us, and more than once I thought, from the gestures of the old man, and his gaze in our direction, that they were speaking of us.

"I wonder Mr. Vivian thinks it right to drive on a Sunday," Cecil remarked sharply.

"I do not think he would drive if the matter only depended on him," John said in answer; "nor would his father if the son's wishes could influence him."

"Mr. Vivian need not accompany him at any rate, if he does not wish to do so," Cecil said.

"Perhaps we do not know all the circumstances of the case, Cecil. I am not sure but that Vivian is exercising more self-denial in acting thus than we give him credit for; I do not wish to discuss the right and wrong of the

question, for I fancy that on that point we should be agreed ; but I am sure that Vivian's society must exercise a great influence for good on that suffering and unfortunate man, and I think he is justified in going a little out of his way to meet him in his pursuits and interests."

"Justified in doing evil that good may come—never!" cried Cecil.

"You misunderstand me, Cecil," John said, "and Vivian is the last person to act as you describe ; only as someone must drive Captain Vivian, and the servant's time has already been sacrificed all the day, I do not see that Vivian does any harm in releasing him and taking his place. How the mist is creeping over the distance—were you advising our return, Miss White?"

Cecil wished to go home by the sand-hills and we walked through the loose sand again, and climbed one of the lowest banks. It was very pleasant, on that elevated ground, where the breeze felt so sweet and fresh, and the soft

turf or smooth sand afforded such a luxurious carpet. All the far distance was misty and obscured, and many lights were gleaming forth in the Redcar windows.

Below us on the sands the tide rippled musically, a few little black specks told of lingering pedestrians, and one larger moving object showed where George Vivian was driving the pony carriage. We stood and watched for a while, and then went on again, up and down the rises and declivities, the loose sand filling our boots, the tall rushes striking their heads against our dresses.

All at once we paused. We had come upon a little hollow in the hill which had an opening to the shore, and there, crouched down on the sand, her face buried in her hands, was the tall stranger whom we had met at the church door. She was sobbing audibly; her slight frame seemed almost convulsed with agitation.

For a second we watched her; she was not mindful of our presence, for the soft sand gave

no echo to our footsteps, and she was too much occupied by her own sorrow to be alive to outward objects. I would have hurried the others on before she was conscious of their presence, but Cecil drew hastily back, looking at the woman with her large, dark eyes brimful of pity.

"I must," she said, in answer to my remonstrance; "I must ask her to let me help her, I cannot leave her when she is in such trouble; do you go out of sight, and leave us alone."

But I would not. I only motioned John Phillips to one side, and stood still while Cecil glided up to the sufferer. The sea was washing in along the shore, ripple after ripple, and wave after wave, and just immediately below the opening passed the little carriage with its grey ponies. But that was in the far distance, too far away for its occupants to see or distinguish us.

Cecil stepped lightly up to where crouched the poor woman, the dry loose sand shelving

down over her footmarks and hiding their traces.

There was a deeper burst of sorrow, a more violent trembling of that poor frame ; then the weary head was upraised, the twilight streamed on to the pale tear-stained face, and the eyes of the two women met.

The stranger started violently, and made an effort as though to rise and pull down her veil. But she was cramped by her low position and sank back again, and the veil had slipped over the back of her bonnet and was hanging round her neck. And already Cecil had sunk on her knees beside her, and laid her little, cool, gloved hands on the burning palms which rested in the woman's lap.

"Forgive me," she said, in her low, sweet tones ; "I am taking a great liberty—but you seem in distress, can I be of any use to you ? I shall be so glad if I can."

Was it the music of the kind voice, or the indescribable influence of human sympathy which made the poor head droop again with

such o'ermastering agony, the blinding tears fall thick and fast on the soft hands which strove to comfort ?

Not another word did Cecil speak as she knelt there, but gently and inobtrusively she made her sympathy to be felt. The stranger knew and understood it, for she held her hands tightly within her own, and more than once pressed her lips to them passionately. When at last she dashed off the tears from her cheeks, and looked up again at Cecil, I had a view of her face. She was no longer a young woman, and whatever she might once have been, she was now far from a handsome one. What a parched yellow complexion, all wrinkled and lined, she had !—what deep, hollow circles surrounded her tear-dimmed eyes, what drooping, dark corners there were to her mouth ! I saw the hair braided round her temples gleam in the unsteady twilight, and it was white as driven snow—oh me, what a sorrowful tale that face told ! What an index it was to that woman's heart.

They looked at one another—my young, untried Cecil and that weary woman—what had they in common?

“Can we help you home?” Cecil asked at length, very tenderly.

The stranger brushed the back of her hand across her eyes and sighed audibly.

“Yes, I will go home, but not with you. Thank you, God bless you for your goodness to me! but I must not go with you, I must go alone—alone,” and she repeated the word sadly.

“But let us take you so far on your way, at any rate—we are going back to Redcar,” Cecil said.

“Not a step,” the woman replied decisively, and she rose with an effort and stood beside us; “not a step—don’t ask it. But I am not unmindful of your kindness—no, I tell you now in the sight of God how you have blessed me—I came here in despair, I would have given anything for death and oblivion, I



even planned how I might gain my desire; now I leave the spot with a prayer in my heart, a prayer for you that you may never suffer as I have done—God bless and be with you !”

“And you will let me do nothing for you?” Cecil asked, laying her hand lightly on the woman’s arm.

“Nothing, but that you will think of me sometimes, when, as to-day, you pray God to ‘pity the sorrows of our hearts.’ We must never meet again—Good night !”

She turned away as Cecil heartily returned the *good night*, and we were already moving up the bank when the stranger came behind and touched Cecil’s shoulder.

“You have not told me what your name is ?”

“Cecil Clerveaux Claridge,” my darling made answer in her clearest tones.

“Clerveaux Claridge !” the woman exclaimed excitedly.

I turned and looked keenly in her face. She was even paler than before, and her mouth was twitching painfully.

"Not *Edward* Clerveaux Claridge's child? it is impossible!" she said.

"Even so," Cecil answered, steadily returning her gaze, and some softer instinct led her to inquire: "Did you know my father?"

"No, no," the stranger said hastily, "I knew nothing about him. I was only surprised because I once knew his wife, such a true, earnest-hearted woman. But surely she could not have been your mother—where is she now?"

"My father was twice married," Cecil said, "you probably refer to my stepmother, who also is dead."

"*Dead,*" repeated the stranger, in a changed voice, "dead, is she? But it is always the way. And she too is dead. I remember her such a sweet young thing, with long, golden hair, and eyes that had not a shadow in them—but that was before—"

"Before Mr. Fielding's death?" I interrupted her, involuntarily.

The stranger started as if she had been stung, and looked eagerly into my face. But she could not read much there, for the dusk was fast gathering, and my features were not sufficiently marked to be tell-tale. There was a moment's pause, and then she repeated very slowly and gravely, but with a slight tremor in her voice. "Yes, before James Fielding's death." And bowing to us both, she moved away and we watched her mount the opposite bank.

"What did she mean? Why do you look like that, Mimi?" Cecil asked, abruptly, putting her arm within mine.

I know not for how long I may have stood there, silent and immovable; but many and strange thoughts had been busy at my heart, many and not pleasing recollections, many and not happy forebodings. For who and what was this woman, and how did she know about us and ours? The Past had few me-

mories that we cared to revive, though very much that we would willingly bury—what could she tell of it, what could she betray?

She had walked in the Coatham direction, and had now entirely disappeared. I had watched her till the outline of her black figure faded in the obscurity; I was gazing now into the distance and seeing nothing, not even the green rushes that the night wind was nodding on the sand-hill before me, not even Cecil's curious glances; only from the Past I was conjuring such sad, miserable visions! Years ago the freshness had worn off Mrs. Claridge's tomb; the summer sun had blistered its paint, and autumn rains and winter snows had stained and discoloured it; lichen and mould were creeping over its surface, the grass around was dank and abundant; she was at peace indeed—but there was no peace to her memory, no peace in my heart when I turned back to think of her.

A great deal of her story I had known from her own lips and Cliff's reminiscences; a

further and darker shadow had been flung on it by the guilty allusions of Mr. Claridge and his accomplice; yet there might be much, very much, of which I was unconscious, much that time and accident would sorrowfully disclose to us. There was a mystery about the woman who had just left us; she had some clue to Salome's history, I could well guess *that* from the tone in which she had referred to her, from the searching, questioning glance with which she had evidently sought to fathom the depth of my knowledge. I must see her again and question her.

"What is the matter?" Cecil asked again, "do you know anything of that woman?"

I tried to smile and allay her suspicions; I moved away, striving to speak and look as usual. Cecil asked no more questions, but I saw that she was not altogether satisfied, that she still wondered, and in that wonderment somehow connected me with the stranger.

John Phillips was waiting for us a little further on, and after a few explanations to

him the conversation was changed and we walked homewards. Coming out on to the sand-road we met the pony carriage with its two occupants. Mr. Vivian bowed and smiled as they drove past. Cecil exchanged some admiring comments with John on the little grey ponies, and our full attention was directed to them, when one of the animals, taking fright at a woman who was emptying a tin of dirty water into the gutter, began to rear and plunge in a most alarming fashion. The reins were in Captain Vivian's hands, and it was but the work of an instant for his son to secure them in his strong, firm grasp. The animals seemed instinctively to recognise his power; they gradually tamed down, and when the carriage turned the corner by the station, they were reduced to their ordinary state of obedience.

"I am sure it is not safe for that old man to drive those ponies!" Cecil remarked. And John said it was a pity that he did not yield the reins entirely to his companion.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## CECIL'S SECRET.

“ Oh you,  
Earth's tender and impassioned few.  
Take courage to entrust your love  
To Him so named, who guards above,  
Its ends and shall fulfil;  
Breaking the narrow prayers that may  
Befit your narrow hearts, away  
In His broad, loving will.”

Mrs. BARRETT BROWNING.

THE following day Miss Armstrong and Thomasina were to arrive, and Cecil went betimes to the small lodging that she had engaged for them, in order to assure herself that all was prepared for their reception. The children were sent on to the sands with

Hannah, and I sat down to write a letter to Salome. We had heard from her this morning; she had sent us a long, merry description of her relatives and their manner of life; a nice chatty letter, all the more pleasant to us because of the loving messages and reminiscences with which each sentence was linked. She was evidently very happy and very kindly treated, but she did not forget us. Burton was still her home, and we her family; she wanted to know all about us and our goings on, and I lost no time in telling her.

At dinner time the children came in, and with them Cecil, who it seemed had joined them out walking. Ruth was eager to tell me how she had seen her friend; Edith and she had been making sand castles, and Mr. Vivian had joined and helped them. Cecil described to me how she had found the party, Hannah sitting demurely on the steps of a bathing machine, and the young man on his knees beside the children explaining the scientific method of building doors and win-

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dows. From all accounts she had taken a lesson too, and Ruth only regretted that the tide would not allow me to see their successful erection in the afternoon. They had seen nothing of John Phillips, but the morning was his busy time, and he did not often go out then.

Ruth could talk of nothing but Mr. Vivian ; he had had the little dogs with him and they had played tricks, begged and run after bits of seaweed. Ruth knew their names, Fly and Wasp, and she could distinguish one from the other and persuade them to come to her when she called. Cecil told me quietly how very good-natured the young man seemed, and how kind he had been to the children ; she said that she thought he *almost* merited John Phillips's good opinion, and that was high praise from her.

Mr. Scott came to see us in the afternoon, and when the train was due Cecil and I went to the station to meet Miss Armstrong. We were rather before the time and had to walk

up and down the platform. Some boys were playing marbles at the further end and made the building echo with their shrill voices.

A woman with a baby in her arms, and a large bundle done up in a blue and white handkerchief, was trying to read the timetable, perhaps to make out when she should reach her destination; the baby all the time peering over her shoulder, contorting its little monkey-like face and treating us with an occasional exercise of its lungs. Cecil and I had to wait for full ten minutes.

The train came at last, a long shrill whistle and a puff of white smoke. We went to the further end of the platform to meet it, and had an early view of Thomasina's ruddy face as she protruded it from the carriage window. Miss Armstrong was there too, surrounded by multitudinous boxes and parcels. She would not descend until all had been separately counted and removed, and Cecil standing below the door, received the smaller packages from her hands.

There were a truck and horse boxes on the train; some of the carriages at the further end were laden with luggage, and I fancied that the face of the servant who was helping the party to dismount was familiar to me.

One of the ladies turned round and I caught sight of her face; it was Louisa Egerton! Yes, and that was Mrs. Egerton who followed, and Susan was holding her mother's dressing-case.

Cecil's attention was drawn to the party at the same moment. I saw her face flush. We had had no idea that they were coming to Redcar, and it was very disagreeable for her to meet them after all that had occurred.

"Those are the Egertons," Miss Armstrong was saying. "They have come in the train all the way from Kirby Holme, and they made such a fuss about their luggage at Darlington."

But I was looking anxiously at the party, counting them over again, discovering Charlie in the distance, but happily no traces of Cap-

tain Leopold—at any rate he had not come to-day.

Cecil was obviously anxious to get out of the station and avoid the awkwardness of a meeting. But Miss Armstrong would dawdle, must talk to the porters about the luggage, must direct Thomasina about coming in the omnibus, and assure herself that nothing had been left under the seats of the carriage, and so the Egertons were upon us before we had a chance of escape.

I saw Mrs. Egerton had recognized us, and I wondered what would be her greeting, or if she would make a quarrel of what had occurred and pass us unnoticed.

Cecil looked extremely hot and uncomfortable.

But I either did not know Mrs. Egerton's powers of self-control or did not give all due credit to her charitable and forgiving disposition, for her manner certainly would never have led one to suppose there had been

the shadow of a misunderstanding between the families.

She came up so cordially and shook hands—ah yes, and in spite of the publicity of the place she *must* kiss dear Cecil, it was such a pleasure to meet—and what news had we of Salome? how we must miss her! Was Redcar full? where were we? She hoped we should see a great deal of one another—they were at quite the other end of the town—should we walk home together? Oh, she understood—Miss Armstrong had only just arrived and Cecil was so kind—well she would not keep us, just say good bye and *au revoir*.

It was wonderful to see how she set Cecil at her ease. I thought first of all she must be unaware of what had passed, ignorant of Cecil's refusal of her dear Leopold's overtures; but that was not likely to be the case. Leopold had been too much indebted to his mother's good generalship to leave her in

ignorance of his wishes when they were so much in unison with her own, and a knowledge of the scheme implied acquaintance with its success or failure. We had hardly a word with the others; Louie passed me unnoticed, but Charlie and Susan had a cordial shake of the hand and a kind word for me. They were soon on their way to their lodgings, and we again had the station to ourselves.

“Well, and how do you get on with your children; are they a great tax on you?” Miss Armstrong asked as we were going along the street.

Cecil repudiated the notion of her children being anything but a pleasure, and with almost motherly pride related little anecdotes illustrative of Edith’s precocity and Ruth’s gentle disposition.

“I had Mrs. Evans to see me last night,” Miss Armstrong was saying, “she came just when I was busy packing, and it was such a bother; people should not come to see you the last day you are at home.”

"I will remember, Miss Armstrong," Cecil said mischievously.

"Now nonsense, my dear, don't be so sharp. I didn't mean you. You know I am always glad to see you; but Mrs. Evans came and sat for ever so long, sending a hundred messages to her children, which were not of the least importance, and only burdened my memory. I am sure I have forgotten more than half of them already. And she has actually sent them some sugar plums by me."

The old lady spoke most indignantly.

"There was no harm in that, surely," Cecil remarked.

"No harm in spending her money over sugar-plums, when she has scarcely enough to buy bread with; very great harm, indeed, I should say, and I told her so!"

"Oh! Miss Armstrong, how could you?"

"Well, my dear, it was the case, and she was a silly woman to do it; she had better uses for her money, and she might depend upon it that the children would have as many

sweet things here as were good for them. And then, what does she do but take umbrage at my advice, and half begin to cry? It was as a little remembrance from her to the children, she said, as if, forsooth, they would not remember her soon enough when they came home—such rubbish as the things are, too.”

And Miss Armstrong paused in the middle of the street, and exhibited to us two tiny parcels of comfits that could have cost but a very few pence.

She put them by again with a grunt of disapprobation, which Cecil left unanswered. I daresay that her thoughts met mine, and went back to that poor, loving mother, whose heart had yearned over its absent darlings, and tenderly devised the small gifts for each. And how that mother would have rejoiced could she have seen the brightening of the little ones' faces when mamma's parcels were produced, and mamma's letter read. Ruth put her sugar-plums aside, as too precious to be eaten, and asked with so great earnestness for



home news, that Miss Armstrong's brow smoothed, and she ransacked her memory almost painfully for the many messages. The very next day she herself was guilty of the weakness of sugar-plum buying, and when she brought home a packet for Ruth, she did so with this excuse; "She wanted to keep her mamma's present, poor child, and it was not fair to let her go without some to eat."

"I'll tell you what, ma'am," Thomasina said to me one day, "Missus's bark is worse than her bite."

And I thought so too, when I accidentally heard what a really kind friend Miss Armstrong was to poor Mrs. Evans.

There was daily evening service at Coatham, and Cecil and I walked there, John Phillips overtaking and accompanying us. George Vivian was at church, too, but though I looked curiously into every corner of the building, I could discover no traces of the woman whom we had met yesterday. The service was just commencing, when a stranger

stole quietly into a place by the door. I saw at one glance that he was Charlie Egerton; afterwards, in going out, he joined Mr. Vivian, seeming very glad to meet him, and the two walked off together. It is odd how things work round; John Phillips, in returning home with us, told me what great friends these two were at college.

"I own I should not have expected that," I said, "they seem so unlike."

"They are great friends, nevertheless," John said, "and are almost constantly together."

"One would not have supposed there could be a point of sympathy between them," Cecil remarked.

"Oh, yes, there is," John said, quietly, "and not one, but many. They have one great mutual interest, which has often before made a bond of union between very opposite characters—the first wish of both is to enter the Church."

"What! Mr. Vivian wishes to be a clergyman, surely not?" cried Cecil.

"Why not?" John asked in a half-amused tone.

Cecil coloured and looked confused.

"One does not fancy that his tastes would lie that way, and he seems so young and fond of gaiety, so merry and quizzical. I don't know what—"

And Cecil fairly stammered and broke down.

I think it was the first time I had ever seen her unable to express her meaning, and I felt a wee smile lurking at the corners of my mouth; why did she not boldly say "so unlike you;" it was what she was feeling him to be.

"Now," said John, "that is just what I complain of; people don't understand George Vivian—they never go beyond his surface qualities—never read the genuine goodness and right principle which work underneath. He has high spirits and many brilliant gifts, and some people are content with these—look-

ing for nothing beyond. But if you only knew him as I do—as Egerton does, you would find how really good and great he is; how, under that light and careless manner, he exercises strict self-discipline and constant self-denial. He makes no display of goodness, he does not speak much about religion, but he acts it—he upholds it by his life and conduct. I believe that in so doing his influence will far outweigh that of a thousand who make more pretensions.”

“Perhaps I should not have passed my opinion till I knew more about him,” Cecil said sweetly.

There was a change in Cecil which I felt insensibly; her present life was softening her strangely. I daresay she herself was not aware of it,—did not mark the new life and hopes that were dawning in her heart; did not understand the new motives which actuated her conduct; did not recognise the love which was waking in her spirit. I saw her daily growing more gentle and womanly; the

very tones of her rich voice were lower and softer—I could hear them tremble sometimes; I had noticed how deep and clear her eyes had grown—how full of feeling and expression; and she smiled more frequently, and when she passed her opinion on any subject, it was with a fuller and wider charity; the very happiness in her lot seemed to be teaching her greater consideration for those around her. I saw it all, and I too was happy, and Mr. Scott saw it as well and breathed his wishes to me. We let them be together as they would, and we spoke hopefully to one another about their future. We had no fear about John Phillips; we liked him for himself and because we were sure that Cecil loved him, and that he was worthy of her love. We had no doubt about his loving her—who could help doing so? And now they were walking a little in advance of me on the footpath, and I could overhear their conversation, though in order to let my presence be no restraint to them, I pretended to be admiring the plants.

in the little flower gardens which we were passing.

"Mr. Vivian will go into the church, I suppose," Cecil said.

"No, I fear not," John answered very gravely; "his father is most violently opposed to his doing so; there is a large fortune entailed on him, and he wants him to live an idle life, or at any rate merely to enter the army. But poor Vivian's heart is bent on the church, and I hardly know how it will end; he is an excellent son, and gives in to his father in almost all things; he will not act against his wishes now, though he tries hard to win his consent."

"What a cruel case," Cecil said; "but don't you think it would justify the son's following his own bent, especially in such a serious matter as this; his father can have no legitimate control over his actions, and he might well consider this a case of right and wrong."

"I doubt if anything can justify opposition to a parent's wishes," John said. "I think that obedience is our first duty, in after life, as well as in childhood. God's blessing generally goes with our parents', and it must be a very serious and imperative duty indeed which leads us to act contrary to their will. Captain Vivian has strong arguments to support his view of the case—arguments which George is fully conscious of and admits. In the first place he naturally wishes to have his son settled near him; in the second place he thinks it a mistake for a clergyman to be independent of his profession; and thirdly he says that the duties incumbent on a man of the fortune which his son will inherit, will materially interfere with the devotion a clergyman is bound to manifest to his parochial interests. I own that there seems to me a good deal of reason in his objections."

For a few seconds Cecil walked on in silence; when she looked up it was to say

with a smiling face to John: "How happy you are to meet with no such interference with your wishes."

"Happy to be obliged to seek independence in some form, happier because independence can be associated with a profession which I prefer above all others. Yes, I think I have many things to make me happy," and either it was my fancy, or he did gaze long and meaningly into Cecil's face.

Their eyes met and hers dropped; she stooped down and plucked a blade of grass from the road side, tearing it nervously into little fragments. And in his turn John too was silent and looked constrained—perhaps he was afraid that glance into Cecil's face had betrayed him, perhaps he had read something in her eyes that he could not understand. When I at length spoke to him he started as though he had been awakened from a reverie, and begged my pardon so nervously that I almost laughed. But somehow we had discomposed him thoroughly, for taking no no-



tice of my suggestion of a walk on the sands, he stopped at the corner and made an excuse to leave us. In perfect silence Cecil and I went home. Once in the drawing-room she found a book and was apparently engrossed in it all the evening, leaving me no opening for conversation.

When I kissed her at bed-time she drew herself shyly away from me, turning her head to one side when I would have looked in her face. But I heard her draw such a long, deep sigh as she went upstairs, and I guessed how she was detecting her own secret.

## CHAPTER IX.

## THE STRANGER IN MOURNING.

"Keep thy soul down! Put on a mask! 'tis worn  
Alike by power and weakness; and the smooth  
And spacious intercourse of life requires  
Its aid in every scene."

"CAPTAIN and Mr. Vivian have been here to call when you were out, Ma'am, and they left their cards," Hannah said one morning when we came in from our walk.

"Captain Vivian!" Cecil said with a little accent of surprise.

"Yes, Ma'am, Mr. Vivian gave him his arm across the street, and he seemed so sorry to find you were out. He sat down for a minute on a chair that I brought from the

dining-room, and then he went back again—he's terrible lame, poor gentleman."

"What can Captain Vivian have called on us for?" Cecil remarked to me whilst going upstairs. "I thought he was too lame to walk at all. I wonder his son did not mention his intention to us when we met him yesterday at Coatham."

We were interrupted by a request for some household requisite, and still having our walking things on, Cecil proposed our going in search of it ourselves. We left the children to be tidied for dinner, and proceeded down the street. We met George Vivian almost at the door. He stopped and shook hands with us.

"My father and I called at your house this morning, and were sorry to find you not at home," he said.

Cecil expressed herself very sorry to have missed them.

"Oddly enough my father has discovered that Mr. Claridge is an old friend of his,"

George pursued ; " he knew him years ago, and nothing would serve him but to come immediately and make your acquaintance. He walked across the street, which is a thing he has not attempted for the last five years, but I fear he will have to pay the penalty of his rashness, for he has been suffering very much since he came in."

" Oh, I am so sorry," said Cecil. " If you had told me I would have come across and seen him rather than have let him run such a risk."

" Would you still take that trouble sometime? My father would think it very kind of you. He was so sorry to be disappointed in seeing you, and I shall try to dissuade him from repeating an execution which costs him so much. He is particularly anxious for tidings of your father. May I tell him that you will honour him with a visit?"

Cecil acceded readily, and after the interchange of a few trivial remarks we went on our way.

The next day she and I paid our visit. We selected the hour immediately preceding that at which the pony carriage was usually to be seen at the Vivian's door. The servant had evidently received his orders, for he ushered us at once upstairs. The sitting-room was small and low, but scattered here and there on the tables were choice books and paintings and vases of rare flowers, evidencing the taste, refinement, and affluence of its occupants.

In a large arm-chair, wheeled to the open window, sat Captain Vivian, his legs supported on a high stool, his emaciated person enveloped in heavy shawls. Close beside him were his never failing companions, the two little terriers.

He made a gesture as though to rise when we entered, but Cecil gracefully entreated him not to disturb himself, and taking a seat by his side began to speak to him of the dogs, and the weather and the place.

His son was absent, but Captain Vivian was fully capable of entertaining and receiving

his guests. He was obviously well used to society, had a ready fund of agreeable conversation, a soft manner with which was blended much old-fashioned courtesy, and he seemed to have a rare facility for adapting himself to the tastes and dispositions of those with whom he associated. But this I did not so much discover during this first visit as in after acquaintance. I wondered to see how rapidly grew his intimacy with Cecil, how readily he seemed to read her character, and to lead the conversation into channels which chimed with her tastes. She was at her ease with him immediately; he drew her out, and she showed herself to the best advantage. She evidently was favourably impressed by her new acquaintance.

I sat just opposite to them both, listening, and sometimes taking a part in their conversation. Captain Vivian was not such an old man as I had fancied him in the distance. His face was worn and furrowed, as though by pain, overspread with the sickly hues of

ill health; but it had been handsome, and still retained the traces of more than ordinary good looks. The features were regular, the eyes were of a good shape and colour; the hair was thick and abundant, though plentifully streaked with grey. His son was like him in features, and either he recalled that son forcibly to my memory, or on some past occasion I had seen some one whom he strangely resembled, for at the first glance his face seemed curiously, painfully familiar to me; I wondered why and wherefore.

Cecil sat talking to him on every day subjects for at least half-an-hour. But he never alluded to his acquaintance with her father, which had been the excuse for our visit, and at last she herself began the subject. Was it my fancy, or did he really shrink from the conversation? I saw him glance keenly at Cecil and me, while he answered, "Yes, I used to know him well some years ago. I trust that the accounts you receive of him are improved?"

Cecil coloured at the allusion to her father's state, and answered, quietly, how he was very much better, indeed almost quite well, adding that we hoped his health would soon be entirely re-established.

Captain Vivian went on to tell of a tour in the Pyrenees, which they had taken together, and dilated on the adventures that had befallen them. He spoke as if they had been very intimate, and much together; but though I listened curiously, I could not discover what had been the date of their acquaintance, nor where they had met.

After awhile Cecil rose to take leave. She patted the dogs, and shook hands cordially with the old gentleman.

"You seem to have taken quite a fancy to my dogs," he said.

Cecil smiled and admired them, and they seemed to reciprocate her liking, jumping uproariously round her, and licking her hands.

He thought they teased her, and he put



out his hand—a large, thin, big jointed hand.

“Down, Fly—be quiet, Wasp,” he called. But they paid no attention to his voice, and in a second the hard, iron hand came down with a heavy blow on the head of the nearest.

The animal darted away with a shrill cry, and Cecil uttered an exclamation of terror. She even seized Captain Vivian’s hand between her own fingers as though to deter it from a repetition of the blow, and said, quite breathlessly :—

“Oh don’t!”

“Don’t what?” he asked laughingly, laying his other hand over hers, and looking up in her face.

“Don’t be so cruel to them,” she said, forcibly drawing away her hand.

He let it go, saying, more seriously, “Cruel is too hard a word, Miss Claridge, for I must not let those creatures be a torment to everyone that comes here. One is obliged to

keep up a little discipline, even with dogs. And see, it was not really hurt; here, Fly, good dog."

The faithful animal crept from under the table, and licked the withered hand which he extended over the chair. Cecil bent down and patted its head.

"It is very affectionate and forgiving," she said.

He laughed slightly, and the sound grated on my ears.

"These dogs always are," he said, and I remembered how I had seen him beat one of them on the balcony—my earliest and most unpleasing acquaintance with Captain Vivian.

We had long settled to go over the iron mines at Marske, and we made up a party for the purpose that afternoon. Mr. Scott came with us and John Phillips, and meeting Mr. Vivian, we persuaded him to accompany us also. We were not home till late, and we all came in together for tea. It had long been growing dusk, and Cecil said laughingly

that she could not see the way to her mouth. We rang for candles, and when these were brought I discovered that more butter was wanted, and sent the servant for it before he had time to draw down the blind. Cecil had her back to the window and I was sitting opposite to her at the bottom of the table. Mr. Scott and John Phillips sat on one side, George Vivian had the other to himself, for the children had been long ago sent off to bed.

I had my cup of steaming tea before me and was asking Cecil for some cream, when I looked a little higher, up at the uncurtained window—and I started. I saw a woman peering in at us through the glass; she had a pale drawn face, and a heavy black veil was flapping over her bonnet. I recognised her immediately as the stranger whom we had met on the sand hills. In a second she was gone; she had evidently seen me detect her, but that pale, careworn face suggested anxious thoughts to my mind. What was her knowledge of or

her interest in us? I rose and pulled down the blind, looking curiously up and down the street as I did so, yet discovering no one.

"What's the matter, Mimi?" Cecil asked.

I would not tell her. I only said: "I am putting down the blind, dear, because the passers-by look in so."

"And you are too modest to eat in public," she said merrily, laying her hand on my arm as I passed her.

I smiled, shook my head, and went back to my place.

It was a soft, balmy evening, and when we looked out from the drawing-room window, the moon was rising like a ball of fire over Huntcliff. Some outbuildings intercepted our view, and Cecil expressed a wish to go out on to the sands to see the moonlight effect, a motion which was warmly seconded by John Phillips. Of course neither Mr. Scott nor I raised any objection, though we did glance significantly at one another and think that the

plan was ingeniously devised by the young people in order to secure a *tête-à-tête*.

We went out the back way, through the yard, and so on to the shore. It was a lovely scene; the wide expanse of wet sand was glittering in the moonlight, the heaving waves were tipped with silver, now a black cloud crossing the light flung a dark shadow over everything. Again the moon was sailing gloriously from behind the veil, glancing on the rippling water and the heaps of sea weed, and casting a long, bright track across the sea.

I sat down on one of the seats, and Mr. Scott found a place beside me. Cecil and John and George Vivian were walking slowly up and down by the sea. Mr. Scott wanted some conversation with me, and he took advantage of the opportunity thus afforded to him. He talked to me about Cecil's prospects and position, and also of John Phillips, and the evident attachment which existed between the two. I believe we never actually

mentioned John's name, but we frequently reverted to him ; we praised his good qualities, and planned for his future, nay, even, in our foolish love of match-making, we fixed his wedding day, and settled him down at Burton Abbots with Cecil. We spoke of Cecil's coming of age on the ninth of September, and regretted that her own wishes and her father's state precluded the possibility of signalizing the day as we should have wished to have done. She had made it a personal request that the occasion might be passed over in silence.

"One thing I would urge," Mr. Scott said to me, "namely that there should be no foolish hesitation about this affair, when once it is brought to the point. You must feel, as I do, that Cecil is a most anxious charge, that a lot such as hers is beset with difficulties, and it is of the first importance to secure her happiness by marrying her to one, who like our young friend over there, evidently loves her for her own sake, and is uninfluenced by

her fortune. That she loves him you tell me you have little doubt; and we are quite satisfied with her choice. With all my heart I wish I saw the two man and wife."

"I hope it may all come right," I said.

"It must come right," Mr. Scott said, energetically; "for her own happiness it must. She has the same nature that made her mother's misery through life, the same devotion and blind idolatry. With a happy choice she will be a happy woman; if she is disappointed she will be heart-broken. Do not be astonished at my warmth, Miss White, but I know what her mother's life was, how she battled and suffered, and at last sank down in despair, and it is no wonder if I am very, very anxious to shield Cecil from a like fate."

"I have heard something of Mrs. Claridge's history, and it is a very sad one," I said.

"You should have known her as I did, and then you would indeed say that her story was

a sad one. Oh, Miss White, she had the truest, purest heart that a woman ever possessed, and she gave every thought and feeling of it without reservation to the man she loved. And he took and trampled on the gift. . . .”

For a second neither of us spoke. At last I said :

“ His has been a fearful punishment.”

“ Yes,” Mr. Scott said, “ the sorrow was brought back to his own heart. He loved his second wife very dearly, did he not ? I never saw her.”

My heart warmed up to the memory.

“ She was the sweetest, fairest creature you can imagine, and as good and gentle as she was lovely. She might not have the same power of affection that Cecil’s mother possessed, but with all her heart she loved and clung to her husband. And by a strange coincidence the tale of his ill-doing never came to her knowledge until the day of her death, and then, in her last agony she turned



from him with repugnance and loathing. To do him justice, I believe he would have died for her ; but she, who had hitherto lived in his smiles, and listened for hours for the echo of his footfall, shrank from him on her death-bed, and expired without granting the word of forgiveness for which he was supplicating. The horror of that moment paralyzed his faculties."

I paused hastily, for close to my ear I heard a low, deep-drawn sigh. It was no imagination, for when I started breathlessly from my seat and looked round, the figure of a woman in deep mourning was passing hastily behind the bench. I tried to intercept her, but she turned quickly at my approach, and ran at full speed in the opposite direction.

Mr. Scott had jumped up from his place, and seizing a corner of my dress to prevent my following her, inquired eagerly what was the matter.

I was glad he had seen the woman too, and I hastily told him how and where we had

previously met, and how only that evening I had seen her gazing in at us through the uncurtained window. He tried to argue with me that she was probably insane, treating the matter very lightly. But I told him of her reference to Cecil's father, and Mrs. Claridge, and he looked graver.

"There is a mystery somewhere," I said; "that woman knows more than we suppose; she spoke significantly of the past. I must see her again, and try to fathom her information."

And I did try to find her and discover her secret. Everywhere about the town I made inquiries for a person answering her description; at all hours I walked far and near to try and meet her. I looked under all the black bonnets in church. I pursued all the black dresses on the sands. I spared no efforts—but all in vain.

Meanwhile the month of our stay had expired; but we found the painting and papering at Burton Abbots a good excuse for pro-

longing our residence at the sea side, and we took on our lodgings for another month. Miss Armstrong returned home much benefited by the change, and the children were sent back to their mother under her escort. The Egertons were still at Redcar, but we did not see much of them. Mrs. Egerton endeavoured to be very intimate, but Cecil gave her no encouragement. We met occasionally on the sands, and when we could, enjoyed the society of little, simple-hearted Susan and her brother Charlie. Happily for us, Miss Louie had an affair of her own on hand with a certain Major MacIntyre—an Indian officer—home on furlough, whom the world said was making a fool of her, though she thought otherwise; and her mamma was not insensible to his good appointment, and devoted herself to securing the prize, greatly to the relief of Cecil, who was consequently left in peace.

John Phillips had been constantly with us, but matters between him and Cecil had made no visible advance. Of their mutual liking, I

had no doubt, but neither had breathed a word on the subject to me, and I dared not question Cecil on what I felt sure touched her so keenly. They seemed both very happy, and there was no necessity to precipitate matters; it was much better to leave them to their own time. They could well afford to wait and enjoy the present. The period of John's stay was drawing to a close, and that I thought would lead to the climax.

John's friend, Mr. Vivian, had been almost as much with us as John himself, and as John prophesied, we had grown to like him immensely. And he seemed to like us too; I am sure he liked Cecil; there was at times almost a chivalrous devotion in his manner towards her, which rendered me uneasy for his sake; but then he was John's greatest friend, and the two seemed so thoroughly to know and confide in one another that there could be no danger of a misunderstanding; and I put the notion to one side when it suggested itself to my mind.

We had often seen Captain Vivian since that first visit. He had apparently taken a great fancy to Cecil, and finding us but ill-supplied from the circulating library, he gave us the full benefit of his box of Mudie's books. He was fond of flowers, and was constantly sending us bouquets, or if we wanted to make any expedition, his pony carriage was placed at our disposal, with his son George as charioteer.

Many a pleasant excursion we made in this way to Shelton, Guisbro', and Kirkleatham, John Phillips always accompanying us and occupying the back seat beside Cecil, while George Vivian, in the front, pointed out to me the choice views of the country. And sometimes civility obliged us to make an exchange, and Cecil came back in my place, and I did my best to console John for her loss, by talking to him of her good qualities and the noble traits in her character.

I always fancied that on these occasions he listened to me with peculiar interest !

## CHAPTER X.

## A PARTING.

"There is in every true woman's heart a spark of heavenly fire, which lies dormant in the broad daylight of prosperity, but which kindles up, and beams and blazes in the dark hour of adversity."

W. IRVING.

"Man's crimes are his worst enemies, following like shadows, till they drive his steps into the pit he dug."

CREON.

"For the parting hour  
Unveils the love that like a stranger hides  
In the heart's depths."

MRS. HEMANS.

WE had driven to Upleatham and Skelton and had returned home for tea. This was John Phillips' last evening, and he and George Vivian were spending it with us. To-morrow

he was to leave Redcar, and Cecil had a grave shadow on her face when he spoke of the necessity for doing so. We were all dull, as often happens before a parting, looking and feeling dull; conversation flagged, and a strange restraint seemed to have fallen over the whole party. The evening clouded in, and when we came up into the drawing-room heavy drops of rain were pattering against the window-pane.

We all brightened up at Cecil's proposal to light a fire. She did not ring for the servant, but herself found the match-box and went on her knees before the grate.

John Phillips knelt down beside her, removing some bits of coal from the top of the kindling, so as to allow the air free circulation.

She made no remark when he came to assist her; her dress brushed against his coat, their hands met in a hasty movement towards the grate. John laughed at his own awkwardness, and she turned her eyes towards him with a sweet, half sad-smile.

I watched the two together ; George Vivian was standing by the table, apparently reading a paragraph in the *Repton Chronicle*, which had been sent me by some of my old home friends. He did not once glance towards the fire-place.

Cecil struck the match sharply ; the flame flickered and spluttered, but the draught from the chimney caught it, and it puffed out in a second. She flung the end of wax on the top of the coals and took another from the box. But it had no better fate than the first.

John took the matches from her hand. "You are unlucky, Cecil, let me try;" and striking one and shading the flame with his hand, he conveyed it in safety to the kindling. "I shall want more paper," he remarked, and Cecil took a letter from her pocket and gave it to him. I saw that Salome's hand-writing was on the envelope, and it was a closely written page which John tore into little fragments, and stowed between the bars. That little record of Salome's innocent pleasures



and wishes, the childlike affection transparent through all she wrote to us, the many messages of love and remembrance—the yellow flame caught and consumed each morsel of the letter, and soon there only remained some feathery bits of tinder floating down on to the hearth, while the fire crackled and burnt bravely, and cast a warm, yellow glow on the faces which John and Cecil bent over it.

We drew our chairs round the hearth, and sat and talked. We went back in memory to the past. Cecil and John were children again; we spoke of the old games under the park trees, the acorns and the beech nuts collected from the shrubbery path; the handfuls of blue forget-me-nots that they used to gather from the soft margin of the brook; the little footbridge without a rail which they crossed with hold of each other's hands, and with palpitating hearts.

George Vivian was somewhat thrown into the background in these reminiscences, and not improbably it was the fear of being in the

way which made him bring forward an excuse, and leave us early in the evening. Then I, in my turn, began to feel myself one too many, and thought they might be wishing me absent too. I made a laughing excuse about not liking to sit idle, and wanting my knitting, and managed to get out of the room.

I did not hurry back again. I threw open my window and sat down close beside it, looking out onto the quiet street and the opposite houses. There was a light in Captain Vivian's drawing-room, and the French windows being wide open I could see clearly into the room. George was sitting at the table, the lamplight falling on his handsome face and the open book in his hand. But he did not appear to be reading; his chin was resting on his hand and he seemed listening and replying to the conversation of some one whom the curtains concealed from my observation—his father probably.

I was thinking about Cecil, wondering what was passing between her and John Phillips in

the next room, planning curiously, yet very brightly, for their Future. No mother could love her child more dearly than I loved Cecil, could be more bound up in her interests and happiness, could more earnestly long and pray for her well-being. I know that I was praying for her even then as I sat there, praying for the rich outpouring of God's Holy Spirit on her dear head. I folded my hands on my lap, and soft, loving tears fell from my brimming eyes and wetted them.

The rain was over, but the drops still clung to the windowframe, pattering one after another on the sill. The centre road of the street was all wet and muddy, and the pavement below and opposite had a darker hue from the moisture. Once or twice I saw an umbrella pass immediately below, and heard the loud hasty steps of a passer. But there were few people astir at this late hour, and when some one paused under the window and seemed to remain there, my curiosity was so far roused that I rose from my seat and looked out.

Straight under the window a woman was standing; the mourning garments, the slight upright figure, the long crape veil, assured me that this was again she whom I had sought so long and curiously, yet hitherto without success! She had a folded umbrella in her one hand, from the wet folds of which a line of moisture ran along the pavement; her clothes seemed nearly saturated and clung damply round her figure; her veil was thrown back and I could dimly trace the pale withered features within the bonnet. I saw her put up an ungloved hand to her forehead as though it pained her, and the sound of her heavy weary sigh rose plaintively to my ears.

She stood there motionless, and I watched her. But our house did not seem the point of interest to her now, her eyes were fixed opposite where through the open window one caught sight of George Vivian, sitting at the table under the lamplight. For full ten minutes she never moved, and I noted every little peculiarity about her, the fashion of her

bonnet, the folds of her shawl, the make of her dress. I saw when she laid her second hand over that which held the umbrella and squeezed both tightly together, as if she were stifling an agonized feeling. Poor thing, if ever there was sorrow printed on a human face it was on hers!

I had been long waiting to see and speak to her and here she was immediately below me. I moved from the window and put on my walking things. When I stole down stairs and opened the front door noiselessly, she was still standing out on the pavement. But she heard the click of the lock as I closed it, and turning round caught sight of my figure advancing towards her. She did not wait for another glance, but walked rapidly, almost ran, along the pavement. I followed her down Bath Street, along the wooden path onto the sands, on and on. She chose the Coatham direction and glanced round more than once to see if I still pursued her. Straight out on the shore,

keeping close to the sea, she went, where lines of white foam still lay on the sand, and one's footsteps sank deep in the moisture. Some sea gulls were uttering wild and piercing cries, skimming over the water; right or left there was not a human being to be seen, only the tall, wild-looking woman in black, who was decoying me further and further into the waste and darkness.

I grew quite frightened at last, but I was too near my goal to turn back like a coward. When at some distance from the town, she paused and waited for me to come up to her, I did so with a palpitating heart. It was almost dark and the stars were coming out; the rain had cleared away, and some heavier clouds were drifting across a grey sky.

"Well?" she said, in a clear, high voice, as I stood beside her.

When I was too breathless to reply, she asked again.

"Well, you want something, what is it?"

Neither her tone nor manner was encouraging, and the place and the hour were certainly not calculated to raise the spirits of a nervous person. But I was acting for Cecil's sake, and I spoke out boldly, though with a quivering voice.

"You know something of Cecil Claridge's father—will you tell me what it is?"

"Never," she said, sharply, "how do you know that I have any acquaintance with him? What is your interest in him or me?"

"My interest is in his child," I said. "I ask it for her sake."

"What is she to you?" the woman questioned, sharply. "Are you her mother, or her sister that you ask. People in this world don't work without a motive—what is yours?"

"I have no natural tie," I answered, mildly; "but I have filled a mother's place to Cecil Claridge, and given her the affection of an undivided heart. My motive is her happiness, in which my own is bound up. If there be

aught in past, present, or future which can harm her, will you not tell me, that I may shield her from it?"

"You speak well," the stranger said; "you speak as if your words had more than mere lip utterance. But I ask, why do you come to me here, what do you expect me to tell you? How am I, who never met you, or her before, to speak to you on subjects about which I can have no possible information?"

"You referred to her father, and a period in his life which I am led to believe is not without its secret; you referred to them significantly, why did you do so?"

"Do you know Mr. Clerveaux Claridge intimately?" the woman asked. "If you do, you might expect his past to have secrets; aye, and secrets into which, for your own, for his child's sake, it were not well to question too narrowly. Why try and sift these, if such there be? If your present be a happy one, enjoy it, and leave the rest. I am speaking for your happiness, with more patience than I



should have done had it not been for the memory of that girl's gentle words in my own sorrow. But I don't ask your name, I don't wish to see, or hear of you after this; and—" and her eyes flashed, and her voice grated harshly; "I *dare* you again to repeat this evening's adventure."

I stood calmly before her; the night wind blowing a thin lock of my hair over my pale face, reddening my weak, tearful eyes; but the darkness was over me and over her. I spoke slowly and without hesitation.

"Did you ever love a human being?" I asked. "If you did you will know that no threat whatever would prove an obstacle when his or her happiness was to be forwarded; no fear, even of death, would deter one from seeking the blessing of a life dearer than our own. When I think of Cecil Claridge, I am strong to brave you and the world."

"Had you said that, a few years ago, and put Edward Clerveaux's name in place of his daughter's, I could better have understood

you," my companion said, quickly. "And I should have pitied you, and watched you grasp misery, and despair, as I have many a time watched others do before you, as once with a bleeding heart I watched the only woman I ever loved. Tell me, did you too know and love, Salome Claridge, Edward Clerveaux's second wife?"

"Yes," I answered, "I loved her, and, moreover, I know something of her history. Mine were the last lips which pressed hers as she lay in her coffin; these very hands gathered up the folds of her winding sheet; the last smile on her face was given to me."

"How did she die?" the stranger demanded in a pained, faltering voice, "surely no one told her of that fearful past?"

I hesitated before I answered, before I committed myself by telling more, and the woman impatiently seized my arm.

"You know," she said, "you must answer

me—did any one tell Salome of her husband's crime?"

"She knew he was not all that she had believed him to be; that unwittingly on her part she had brought injury and misfortune on an innocent man; that James Fielding's ruin might be attributed to her, that at least it had been originated by one whom she held dearer than herself."

"And she looked upon herself as his murderer, and the thought killed her. Oh! God, that it should be so. Woman!" and she held my arm as in a vice, "It was all untrue, untrue, I swear it. Edward Clerveaux's crimes were many, but the stain of murder was not on his hands. I swear it as I stand before God. He did not touch that cup! Murder might be in his heart when he saw James Fielding's calm happiness and the child that clung to him with a smile on her face, that was a reflection of her mother's, but he turned from the temptation, and the sin was uncom-

mitted. I stood beside him watching him, though he knew it not; music and dancers were on the greensward, and the banquet was spread out on the grass; the trees drooped down with their green feathery boughs, sunlight quivering on the breeze stirred leaves, and I stood in their shadow with the branches hiding me. I stood so near that I could have touched him where he sat, and I tell you that he never did it—James Fielding died a natural death!”

The sea murmured softly, rippling to and fro over seaweed-covered rock that the tide was leaving uncovered; far away in the distance a signal light was gleaming from some vessel head.

The lock of thin hair rose and fluttered on my cheek, and my breath came thick and fast, I could not answer her. What was I learning? How the events of the past were thickening upon me! It had been a dark enough tale before, now it was a very record of the night! I dared not tell the woman

that she had brought a new phase of the story before me; I could only gather up the fragments of truth that she let fall, and garner them for future use. I had not heard the suspicion of this crime before she put it to one side; she said Edward Clerveaux was innocent, and I thanked God for his child's sake!

"Who dared tell *her*, who breathed the subject to Salome?" the woman asked.

"Nay," I answered, "I do not think that the foul tale of murder was ever breathed to her. It was a stranger, a Captain Rogerson, who told her something in confidence, which though unrevealed by her, preyed upon and broke her heart."

The woman shrieked. "Captain Rogerson! Oh, no! unsay those words; he could not! Tell me that you mistook the name, that it was not Captain Rogerson! How could you know him?"

"He came, in the first place, on business, and accidentally encountering Mrs. Claridge in

the grounds, requested a private interview with her. I left them together; I do not know what passed between them, but when I rejoined her the blow had fallen, and she was dying."

I waited for the woman to speak, but she was sobbing as if her heart would break; her head was bent down in her hands. And in ripple after ripple came the salt water over the seaweed rocks, and the stars gazed down upon us with a thousand eyes.

"We must not remain here," she said, "but, good-night, we will shake hands before we part. I understand you better now, I think I know why you have this strange interest in Edward Claridge's daughter. I said we would never meet again, but I begin to think differently; we *shall* meet again; I *may* need you and you *must* need me; good-night. But stay—I too have a question to ask, which you can and will answer. You have a young friend, George Vivian, what is he like?"

I own that I felt startled, and glanced round

at my questioner. But the greyness of night was everywhere and I could gain no clue to her interest.

"We all like him very much," I said; "and those who know him even better, speak of him in the highest terms. If you have seen him you will have perceived that he is a singularly fine-looking young man. I do not think that his heart will belie his face."

"Thank God!" I heard her say, softly and gravely, as she turned away.

Why should she thank God for George Vivian's goodness? Wave after wave of mystery was encircling me; when would the truth be left uncovered as that rock by the out-going tide? But I had turned in the direction of Redcar, and was hurrying homewards.

Cecil and John were still in the drawing-room together when I came in; they did not seem to have noticed my absence, and hastily divesting myself of my out-door attire, I joined them.

They were in their old places over the fire as I went in ; the room was in half darkness, the candles standing unlighted on the table behind.

"Have you found your knitting at last, Miss White?" John asked as I brought in my chair.

Cecil looked up somewhat nervously, and with a half laugh said : "We thought you would need us to come and help you, you were so long, Mimi."

I found a ready excuse, and Cecil began dusting some small coal from between the bars of the fire with the end of the poker. I think she found the conversation a little uncomfortable, and having gained a clue to my object, began to fear that John might do the same. But what a merry, unsuspecting face John had ! I quite regretted that he did not show more consciousness or *mauvaise honte*. His clear, blue eyes looked boldly into mine, not the least as though he was ashamed of having stolen my most precious treasure from



me; Cecil made some remark, and he answered her as freely and unhesitatingly as her brother could have done. It was not the fire-light alone which cast those flickering shadows over her face—not the yellow blaze only which reflected itself in her glistening eyes; but his brow was unruffled, his glance and his tones were steady. Was he so sure of her whom he loved, that his heart was perfectly at peace; had he such full, thorough confidence in himself and her that he could part from her without a pang, and she so rich and courted? Aye, and so truly great and good, if the world but knew it! Lovers are not usually secure and tranquil, or perfectly at their ease; and I watched him anxiously. He was too just and high-minded to trifle with any girl's happiness. I felt aware of that, and certainly his attentions to her and preference for her society had been unmistakeable; Cecil would never have received the one, or suffered the other from a man she did not love; and with a beating heart I looked from one

to the other. I was sadly afraid that in spite of the opportunity I had offered them, neither knew the state of the other's feelings. Well, it was provoking when I flattered myself I had managed so cleverly.

The clock struck eleven. He had not known it was so late, and he rose to take leave.

"I fear it must be good bye as well as good night," he said, "for I leave to-morrow by the early train," and with a smile on his lips, he gave his hand to Cecil.

She placed her own in it, and he wrung it warmly. The lad had ever a kind and cordial greeting for her, and I am sure that even for the memory of his childhood he must have loved Cecil Claridge.

But Cecil disappointed me; she seemed suddenly to have frozen; her manner was restrained, her voice harsh and cold. Her face grew very pale, and only once she lifted her eyes to meet his. But he was laughing at me, who in my agitation had almost upset a flower

glass, and her gaze sought the floor, and her lips folded tightly one over the other.

You would have thought her hand was dead, it lay so passively within his, and when he released it, it dropped slowly and heavily at her side. She said good bye to him in a chill formal tone, in which there was not a heart sound; and I thought that he looked round at her in disappointment and as if reproachfully.

His farewell for me was hearty and good humoured, and ere closing the door he turned once more to Cecil:

“Good bye, Cecil, it has been such a pleasure to me to make friends with you again.”

She smiled very faintly, but returned no answer, and the door closed behind him. We heard his footsteps on the staircase and in the entrance, then the front door sounded heavily, and my darling gave a sigh of relief.

## CHAPTER XI.

## GLIMPSES OF THE TRUTH.

"Every man has in himself a continent of undiscovered character. Happy is he who acts the Columbus to his own soul!"

I WAS late in going to bed, but once at rest I slept heavily, and was only woke by the entrance of Hannah with hot water. She opened the shutters and drew up the creaking blinds, and the glaring, yellow light fell painfully on my half opened eyes. It was a lovely morning, she said, and I could well guess that it was so from the sunshine resting on the opposite house, and the clear blue sky overhead.

She was going out of the room again when I asked if she had called Miss Claridge.

"Oh, yes, Ma'am," she answered, "Miss Claridge has been up and out ever since seven o'clock."

I was surprised, for Cecil was not in the habit of walking before breakfast. Enquiring if she had returned yet, and hearing that she had not, I dropped the subject, and Hannah having left the room, I rose and began my toilet. Half an hour later I recognised Cecil's step on the staircase; she was evidently going up to her own room, and I thought that perhaps she might look in and see me as she passed. But no, she went straight upstairs, and I heard the door close behind her. When I descended to the dining-room she was at the breakfast table making the tea, her walking things off, her face as calm and unruffled as ever, only, perhaps a shade paler and graver.

She made no remark to me about having been out, and I asked nothing. I was just going to sit down at the table, when she laid

her hand on a small book beside her, and said—

“If you do not mind, Mimi, I should like to have the servants in and read prayers before breakfast. It is a practice which I have always wished to adopt in our household, but one thing or another has hitherto stood in the way. If we begin it here, the continuance of the habit will follow naturally at Burton Abbots.”

I was pleased by the proposal, and looked and said so, though at the same time a little curiosity dawned on my mind as to why and how she had made so sudden a resolution. Cecil rang and gave her orders to the servants. There was a short period of waiting while the maids tidied themselves before obeying the summons, and she sat bolt upright opposite to me, with her finger on the page which she was going to read, and her eyes bent on the ground. I knew that the effort was painful to her, and that though she did not betray nervousness, she was feeling it acutely. Still

she went through the task bravely and unflinchingly, her voice neither fell nor quavered.

We sat down to breakfast afterwards, and she filled her plate, but I noticed that she never attempted to eat, and with great difficulty finished her cup of tea. I made no remark ; I knew something of Cecil's disposition, and I could guess what she had suffered in the parting of this morning.

For more than an hour I sat alone in the drawing-room with my work. Cecil had gone upstairs immediately after breakfast, and though I suspected she was in trouble, and I longed to comfort her, I judged it more prudent to leave her to herself; her self-government would be more effectual than my poor efforts at consolation.

The post came in, bringing letters for her, and as she did not come down to receive them, I ventured to take them upstairs, and to knock at her door. She was a long time in opening it, and when at last she did so, though her

eyes were dry and tearless, the traces of violent agitation were discernible on her face.

“I’ve brought you up your letters, dear,” I said, “may I come in?”

She opened the door further and allowed me to pass; mechanically she took the letters from me, and going back to her place on the window seat, laid them down on her lap.

I seated myself on the chair opposite to her. I was longing to tell her how I felt for and with her, but the power of speech had failed me, and I could only sit silent and uncomfortable beside her. Downstairs I had been planning great things as I sat at my work, framing kind and loving speeches to be breathed to her, which should assure her of my sympathy and affection, scheming how she and John could meet again, and come to a proper understanding; but the very memory of all this fled from my mind now, and when at last I spoke, it was only to say in a low, choked voice:—



"I am so very very sorry for you, Cecil."

A child might have said the same, and done as much in the way of consolation, but I felt it as well as said it, and their sincerity gave power to my words.

Cecil jumped up from her seat and clenched her hands, while the letters fell all unperceived on the carpet.

"Mimi, I hate myself, I do indeed, I hate and despise myself!"

"My dear!" I exclaimed in a startled voice.

"Yes, Mimi, it is all true. I have seen into my heart and I hate what is there; if you saw too you would despise it—if others did—oh dear! oh dear!" and the cry with which she finished pierced me through and through, it was so bitter and heartrending.

"You are unjust to yourself, Cecil; do you not know that it is possible to wrong oneself as well as to wrong others?" and I laid my hand softly on her arm.

She shrank from my touch.

"Don't, don't, Mimi; don't help me to deceive myself, I am only too ready as it is."

"I have no intention to do so, Cecil, I love you too dearly; I would not have you cover one sin that called for repentance towards man or confession to God. If I could help you in any way it should be first of all in preserving a pure, upright, and truthful heart, and a just judgment of yourself. I think you are failing in this last particular now."

"You don't know all, Mimi, you judge better of me than I deserve," murmured the poor child.

"Will you let me lay the case clearly before you, and tell you what I think of it?" I asked.

She shrank visibly from the suggestion, but she did not say *no*.

"The great trial of a woman's heart has come upon you, Cecil," I pursued, "the portion of sorrow which a wise Providence has designed as our peculiar lot. I do not believe that any woman passes through life without

some such cross, though the natural character of each varies the suffering, sometimes lessens, sometimes aggravates it. Because we are weak and loving we instinctively cling to something that is better and stronger than ourselves. It is not a natural or a happy thing for a woman to stand alone in life; when the holiest ties of all are denied her, she will turn to those of her fellow creatures who are nearest to her, and by forming claims on their hearts, win rest, and peace, and comfort, make an outlet for the affection and energies which can find no more direct channel. Our love is a general blessing, for which man owes gratitude to the Almighty; we should value it as we do any other gift or talent entrusted to us, and if possible we should not misplace it."

"As I have done," poor Cecil murmured.

"I did not think you had misplaced your affection, dear," I said with a slight smile, "I thought John Phillips was very excellent and estimable, almost worthy of the precious

gift you have given him, which is saying a good deal. I did not suppose you had cause to judge otherwise of him."

"Oh no, I don't!" cried Cecil energetically, "don't misunderstand me, he is only far, far too good, he can never care for me; and, Mimi, how dare I allow that I care for him when he does not care for me; the confession is so derogatory to one, so humiliating! I think I shall never look you in the face again!"

"But why do you think he does not care for you? I am sure my conviction is very much the contrary. Young men of John Phillips's stamp are not in the habit of walking with young ladies, and choosing their society, and endeavouring by all means to testify their preference, without some definite object or strong liking. Their conduct would be very open to misconstruction if they did. The idea is not worthy of John Phillips; you wrong him and yourself too, Cecil."

"Mimi, be merciful and do believe me. I want to do John justice, I don't want him to

bear the brunt of my foolishness. You must not let me cast a shadow on him, I could not bear that. I see all his goodness and excellence, I *feel* it and that is more, but I cannot honestly say to myself that he loves me. I have tried to think so sometimes and it made me so happy to fancy it. But I never felt sure, I don't now, and though my heart is almost breaking, I don't blame him, for I know that I am not worthy of him."

"I won't listen to this, Cecil," I said, "it makes me angry," and I went on to reason with her on the foolishness of her present conduct and to build hopeful schemes for the future.

She would not listen to me ; she shook her head sadly, and answered :

"I wish I could believe you, but I have loved him so entirely that my heart would have been alive to the faintest response from his. Sometimes I watched and listened, I cannot tell you in what agony, but I never could gain one clue to the truth, and I won't

deceive myself whatever I do. There, don't distress yourself, I'm not cut out for a love-lorn damsel, no one will ever detect anything in me, and we will cling together through life, you and I, Mimi, and only learn charity from the Past."

She put up her mouth to be kissed, and I pressed my lips to her forehead.

But my convictions were still unchanged, and I said so. I knew that despite all her protestations, she listened to me with keen interest and clung to every word of hope I dared to breathe. No woman can let her love starve so long as there is a crumb to feed it with; and I did think that I had good foundations for my opinion, and dealt it forth without misgiving. We were happier together now we had laid bare the hidden trouble; it made a stronger bond of union between us. Cecil could depend on my love and secrecy, and she was all the better for having some one to speak to instead of thinking and dreaming over the matter till it festered in her heart. She did

look up at me and say, "Oh, Mimi, I feel so ashamed, I think you must despise me; is it not humiliating for a woman to admit the existence of an affection which meets no return?"

But I answered, "Not in this case, I think. And I should have been hurt if you had not judged me worthy of the confidence. I do not suppose that you are going to impart the secret to the world at large, and ask for general sympathy and commiseration, or wear a dolorous aspect, which shall provoke comment and curiosity. With regard to the actual shame of caring for those who do not care for us, it is a natural feeling, and in the cases where it does exist, it should be battled with, but I think it rather calls for pity than contempt. It is no degradation to a man to feel a hopeless attachment; it is to a woman if she brings it too prominently forward; if she feels it, overcomes it, and learns charity and self renunciation from the lesson, it is a glory. Most, if not all, the best and bravest women

have battled with and overcome themselves, have cleansed their own hearts with the hyssop of a pure and strong will. We never feel cordially for our neighbours, till we have suffered acutely ourselves."

"Have you suffered, too, Mimi?" Cecil asked softly.

A few tears dropped one after another, on my turquoise ring, as I gazed down on the clasped hands in my lap. Had I not? But it was a long, long while ago, now.

Cecil knelt down beside me.

"I have pained you, I shouldn't have asked," she said.

"Nay, dear," I answered, fondling her hair, "I do not mind telling you, and there is comfort as well as sorrow in the memory. But it is a tale with small interest and no romance. I loved a penniless youth, and was loved in turn. I was the only child of a country practitioner, and Robert Hinchcliffe was his assistant. We had nothing to marry on, and when my father gave his consent to the en-



gagement, it was conditionally that Robert should make me a home before he claimed me as his wife. We were both young, and content with our present happiness, we had no fear for the future, and when Robert slipped this turquoise ring on my finger, as we walked side by side along the river banks, I thought no prospect could be fairer or brighter than my own. Well, we waited and waited, and at last our affairs seemed more hopeful. Robert had saved enough to purchase a small practice, and we began to plan together for our home. But the happiness that we devised was never to be ours; he had always been delicate, and that very winter a bad cold settled on his chest, and turned to inflammation. For fifteen years after his death I kept my father's house, and when he too died I had to make a livelihood for myself, for I was left almost penniless. It was then that a friend recommended me to Mr. Scott as a suitable governess for you. That is my whole history—there is not much in it, Cecil."

But Cecil was pressing my hands tightly between her own, bathing them with warm, loving tears.

"Oh, Mimi, how could I speak to you of my little sorrow, when yours has been so much greater; how could you ever live through such trouble?"

"God gave me strength, Cecil, and when the first bitterness was over, there was great peace left in my heart. I had seen Robert Hinchcliffe die, and it was as a christian dies, in the sure and certain hope of a blessed resurrection. He had spoken of our meeting again, and still I am waiting and looking forward to that meeting."

I let my own tears fall for a while, and Cecil wept with me. When we rose up at last with a mute pressure of each other's hands, we were both calmer and happier. I recalled her letters to Cecil's mind, and she stooped down and collected them from the carpet. I had one more question to ask her,

and I brought it forward as we were leaving the room.

"You were out this morning, Cecil, where did you go?"

A crimson colour flooded her face and neck, but she lifted her eyes steadily to mine.

"I was very silly, Mimi, but I could not resist going on to the Coatham sand hills to see the train start."

"Did you meet John?" I asked.

"Oh, no, I only fancied that I saw him as the carriage passed. I thought I should be happier for seeing the last of him, and he could not see me. Was I very wrong to do it, Mimi?"

I could not say that she was, though it was one of the sillinesses of women's hearts. Why do women treasure up old, withered leaves and dead flowers, and touch senseless, inanimate things with reverent fingers because of their associations? Why do they recall light, passing speeches, picture bygone smiles,

live over again, in moments of solitude, all the sweet, dreamy hollowness of the past? There is a strange mine of poetry in many a woman's heart, written in smiles and sighs through the annals of her life, but which, because she fails in giving it expression, thrills no spirit beyond her own; the very lowest and humblest are not without their secrets, or their romance. God alone knows the unrecorded legends, and it is well for us that He is more merciful than man, and balancing the shortcoming with the temptation, judges more righteous judgment.

One of Cecil's letters was from Mrs. Cliff, announcing her intention to join us at Redcar that day week; she had a great wish to see the place again and revive her old reminiscences of it. The Abbots, she said, was all ready for our reception, and if we remained away to the end of the fortnight, the disagreeable smell of paint would be quite worn off before our return. She gave a long account of the housekeeping, and all the collected

news of the neighbourhood ; and as the whole was written in small, cramped hand it took Cecil some time to decipher. Another letter, in large text, from Ruth Evans, was in a very different strain, and dilated gladly on the enjoyment she found in being drawn about in her little bath chair, Cecil's latest gift ; she and her brothers and sisters had been to spend the day at a farm house, a mile out of Kirkby Holme, the mistress of which had once been their nurse ; and she told exultingly of the peacock-feathers they had brought home with them, and the strawberry feast of which they had partaken. It was a happy little letter, and one learnt from it that, in spite of her trial, Ruth Evans was a happy child. Cecil smiled as she put it away.

Hannah summoned us to the drawing-room, saying that Mr. Vivian had called ; and on descending we found George with a lovely bouquet, which he had brought for Cecil. He presented it shyly ; but she always looked upon him as John's particular friend,

and liked him accordingly, and now she received the flowers so graciously, admired them so much, and took such great pains with their arrangement in the vases, that his face brightened up, and sitting close to her he began to discourse eagerly, and with unusual animation.

Her head was bent down as she enjoyed the fragrance of a Cape Jessamine, and glancing up I caught the expression of his face as it was turned towards her. There was a something there, so earnest, so ardent, so *loving*, that I started painfully and a perception of the truth thrilled my heart.

A man never but once in life sees a woman with those eyes; it is the one vision of perfection that comes generally and hopelessly on boyhood, sometimes, though rarely, on manhood, never to the cool calculation of middle age—men do not often look so on the woman they marry, for it is a glance given to a first love, and who, either man or woman, marries his first love? Yet so George Vivian was

gazing at Cecil, and the glance betrayed to me that he loved her ! And she loved John Phillips, wholly, undividedly, as a woman loves with whom love is the passion of a lifetime, and not a mere passing emotion that can be forgotten or superseded. I guessed that she would never so love another ; but George Vivian loved her as she loved John Phillips. I had never seen that same glance on John's face. Oh ! these poor, struggling, human hearts !

Cecil knew and guessed nothing. With the freest, friendliest cordiality she discoursed with George about the flowers, and on matters of mutual interest. He had not read a book she mentioned, and she found it and lent it to him. She laughed at the anxiety he betrayed to read it, and called him an incorrigible bookworm ; she did not see, as I did, that its chief interest lay in the title page, where her own hand had traced her name in flowing characters.

George had had a secondary object in his

visit, and to my infinite distress he brought it forward now. The day was so lovely his father had thought we might like a drive—would we allow him to bring the pony-carriage for us after our early dinner?

I hoped that Cecil's good sense would suggest the expediency of a refusal; but alas, all unsuspecting, she testified considerable pleasure at the suggestion, and with the slightest reference to me accepted it unhesitatingly.

George rose, his handsome face radiant with satisfaction, and took leave. It was not necessary to shake hands when we should so soon meet again, nevertheless he did so and I guessed why!

Cecil and I were left alone; she, finishing her bouquet-making, I, puzzling my brain as to how I could warn her of the difficulty of her position without exciting her suspicions unnecessarily.

After a pause I said: "You don't seriously intend to go this expedition, do you?"



"Yes, to be sure I do, and I never doubted that you would come too, what do you mean, Mimi?" she said raising her head rather quickly.

"Oh, nothing at all," I answered, "only that the world has such a busy tongue, I thought there might be disagreeable comments made if we went out continually with Mr. Vivian.

"Mimi!" Cecil exclaimed in a startled tone. But when I did not immediately answer, she burst out laughing. "I never heard such a notion, what perfect absurdity! Well, we'll let the poor people talk and amuse themselves if they like, it doesn't signify to us, for we know more of the truth. And what could they please to say? That George Vivian was making up to you, or I making up to him? In either case what a charming arrangement! I feel gratified, I hope you are so as well!"

It is not pleasant to have one's serious way of putting things turned into a joke, and I

answered in rather a huffed voice: "If you consider the case in the way in which the world will view it, it is by no means such an absurdity. People think it only natural for young people of equal position and suitable years to like one another, and when they are constantly seen together it is not astonishing that conclusions should be drawn. I am sure I see no reason why, had your heart been disengaged, you should not have liked George Vivian; he is everything that one could wish. You know that you are not likely to care for him now, but others do not, and so far as I am aware neither does he. For his sake even I do not think you are prudent in throwing yourself so much in his society."

"Mimi!" and this time Cecil's voice had quite a pained accent.

"It is indeed quite true, dear child, one must always consider others at the same time that one considers oneself, and there is nothing unmaidenly in viewing even remote possibilities when they concern the peace and

comfort of our neighbours. We are bound to do so and to weigh them well, so as to guard against any possible misunderstanding of our conduct."

"You speak as if you were addressing Salome instead of me," Cecil answered, and her tone had a bitter accent as she continued: "I am not so charming or attractive that there can be any fear of people falling in love with me. George Vivian indeed! I don't suppose he gives a thought to me beyond what is due to his friend's friend. Really Mimi, I cannot take such crotchets into my head; but if you think it more prudent I'll send an excuse for this afternoon, only don't let it be cold, or headache, or fatigue, for I am always uncomfortable over story-telling."

I took her at her word, and we concocted a little note between us, in which we salved over the refusal, but without alleging any excuse. When Hannah took the note I feared to myself that George Vivian's heart would ache over the reading of it.

## CHAPTER XII.

## MRS. EGERTON'S GENERALSHIP.

"There is not a fiercer hell than failure in a great object."

KEATS.

"Man's evil manners live in brass; their virtues we write in water."

SHAKESPEARE.

CECIL and I did not go out till we had seen Captain Vivian and his son start for their drive. Then we wended our way down to the shore and sat out there reading. We were neither of us much in the humour for talking, and when I wearied of my book I left Cecil and her campstool in the shadow of the bathing machines, and amused myself with stroll-

ing slowly along the sands and remarking my neighbours.

A group of three was coming towards me, one of whom was a tall, rather stout man, whose face had a singular resemblance to the prints of the French Emperor, and that he was conscious of the likeness and endeavoured to cultivate it I judged from the fashion of his hairdressing and the piquant little moustache on his upper lip. He was talking earnestly, and the lady at his side seemed well inclined to listen graciously to his conversation. I did not see her face, but by the long-fringed, light-coloured parasol and some other minutiae of dress I recognised her as Louisa Egerton.

Mrs. Egerton made the third ; but, distinguishing me in the distance, she left her companions and hurried to join me. I had heard before that Major McIntyre was leaving England in the early autumn ; Miss Louie and her mamma had no length of time for the accomplishment of their scheme matrimonial, and had to bring matters as rapidly as possible to

a crisis. Already Redcar gossip began to surmise an engagement, and conjecture the amount of the young lady's dowry. Some passing reports had even reached us, but Cecil and I did not give them much credence, for the Major was supposed to be generally partial to lady's society and particularly given to flirtation. We had often smiled to one another as we watched the party, and said how well he and Mrs. Egerton were matched.

Mrs. Egerton seized me by both hands and enquired after *dear Cecil*. I said that she was sitting out yonder, but my companion did not turn round to join her; on the contrary, she proposed walking in the opposite direction, and even explained why.

"I have been so longing for a little private conversation with you, Miss White, and most thankful am I for this opportunity. Your interest and mine are so alike bound up in that dear girl that we surely ought to understand one another better than we do, and I have such reliance on your good sense and excellent

judgment, that I feel no hesitation in speaking to you as I might have done to poor Cecil's mother. You see her position is so very peculiar, so almost painful, that it needs to be guarded by a very careful and jealous hand; and really people are so extremely ill-natured in their remarks that one cannot be too cautious in one's behaviour."

I wondered what was coming, and glancing after the Major and Miss Louie, signified assent to this last remark of my companion.

She went on: "You live so retired that I daresay you are little aware of the curiosity which ever since your arrival you have awakened in this quiet place. Some particulars of Cecil's story preceded her, and people have watched her and interested themselves incessantly in her and your proceedings. Of course your intimacy with Mr. Phillips and his friend seemed, to those who knew the particulars of the case, only a natural consequence of your acquaintance of former days; but—" and I suppose my brow must have lowered,

for Mrs. Egerton continued in a deprecatory tone ; “ but—and you must forgive me if my interference appears unwarrantable, for I am only urged to it by real affection for dear Cecil—but people chose to comment upon their being so much with you, and to raise reports with regard to both gentlemen, that I am sure would be most disagreeable to you did you hear them.”

“ They were not intended to come to our ears,” I said coldly, “ and so I suppose it would be unnecessary to trouble ourselves about them.”

“ Oh yes, of course, and I can assure you I have always contradicted the reports whenever they reached me. You may depend upon my doing that. I said it was quite preposterous to speak of John Phillips and Miss Claridge in one breath, for she would as soon think of demeaning herself by marrying her footman. Why, he’s only the younger son of a clergyman who has not a farthing of private fortune, and the Phillipses are nobodies ! I



know as a positive fact that Mrs. Phillips was a native of Leeds, the daughter of a tanner or something very low."

"Her father had the Trinity Church for many years," I said, with a little spirit.

"Oh! well, I'm glad to hear it; it sounds more respectable, but I do assure you the Phillipses have no origin whatever. One of Mrs. Phillips' sister was out as a governess, and another married old Jarmieson, of How-knowle, nothing but a common farmer."

I was fairly provoked, but I did not care to show my annoyance and enlighten Mrs. Egerton as to the true state of the case, which it seemed to me she was only beating about the bush to discover. I bit my lips and maintained absolute silence. She now turned the conversation on George Vivian.

"What an unfortunate thing it is for that poor, young man, that his father's ill reputation should so clog his prospects. He is such a handsome, amusing youth, and Charlie, who knows him at College, says he is so steady

and well-disposed. But of course, knowing the antecedents of his family, and the disagreeable stories attached to his father, one is very careful how one encourages any intimacy. As I said to Charlie, really I cannot hear of his having any introduction to my girls or being invited to the house."

The old lady seemed to be adding scandal and untruthfulness to her many other misdemeanours, and it was too hard on George, who was really so good and high-principled; and with regard to his father, though I did not personally like him, I had heard nothing against his character. I said so somewhat hotly.

"Is it possible?" Mrs. Egerton exclaimed, "dear me, I wish I had known it before, and I should have warned you long ago. And to be sure when I wondered at your permitting Cecil to make their acquaintance, I might have been positive that you were in the dark, or you never would have done it. Oh! Captain Vivian has been a shocking character, quite

dreadful ; before he came in for this property he was nothing in the world but a *black leg* ; he even made England too hot for him, and was obliged to live abroad. And his behaviour to his wife was the worst of all. I knew something about her, for she was a Miss Arbuthnot, of Rockingham, and we were at school together. At least she came as a little girl just as I was leaving, and I heard afterwards of her during the London season, when her beauty made such a sensation. I remember her marriage perfectly. It was not considered a good match, for at that time Captain Vivian had but a small fortune, inherited from his father, and even then he was not considered over and above steady. But, like his son, he was very handsome and very fascinating, and he worked his way into Grace Arbuthnot's heart—poor thing, I dare say she repented her foolishness many thousand times when it was too late. He was very unsteady after his marriage, and I believe that she too was foolish, but they soon went abroad

and we never heard of them again till the newspapers rang with the story of her mysterious disappearance. It was said that she had eloped, but later it was found that she had committed suicide, and I believe that her body was taken out of the Seine."

Exaggerated or unexaggerated, the story was a sad one, and probably had a foundation of truth, and I sighed over it.

Mrs. Egerton went on: "Her husband behaved brutally to her, it is said, and do you wonder at it when you look at his face? Did you ever see such a countenance?"

"He is a sad invalid now," I said, excusingly.

"Yes, but you know he has no one to thank for that but himself. He had a duel about some money matters at one of the German gambling houses four or five years since, and was frightfully shot. I believe he was hardly expected to recover at the time, and it is only wonderful how he goes about now."

Mrs. Egerton and I had a little further con-

versation, chiefly on general subjects, after which, to my horror, she began a preface about my kindness and sympathy, and fellow feeling, which finally launched us on the topic of dear Leopold's unchanged attachment to Cecil. She surmised that naturally I should be aware of what had passed, and regret it; she bewailed the precipitancy which had brought him prematurely to the point, spoke of the strength and depth of his attachment (such humbug!) and of her faith in the power of steady devotion, such devotion as he was now manifesting, such self-control and consideration as he had exercised in remaining for so many weeks absent from his beloved one, when every thought and feeling had urged him once more to seek her society.

I heard her with scarcely preserved patience, and when she began to enlist my services, and entreat my co-operation, I answered her bluntly, and to the point.

"You mistake me, Mrs. Egerton," I said, "if you suppose I would exert any small in-

fluence I may possess in such a matter as this. Cecil is no child now, and knows best what concerns her own happiness. I should never venture to dictate to her on such a point. If she consults me, well and good ; I will give her my opinion, without regard to person or thing, tell her honestly what I think of her prospect of happiness ; but I should as soon dream of flying as of interfering in this case. And with regard to your son's prospect of success, since you ask me, Mrs. Egerton, I must tell you that I am sorry he indulges the hope, for I am sure his feelings are unreciprocated. He will only subject himself to a second refusal if he revive the matter."

I said something to this effect, but more at length, and while listening to me, Mrs. Egerton's brow darkened, and a little red patch burnt on her cheek. She was vexed and disappointed, and her annoyance was principally directed to me, whom she began to suspect as the chief obstacle in her path ; she fancied, forsooth, that I did not like her dear Leopold,

and stood in the way of the favourable prosecution of his suit.

"We have mistaken one another, Miss White," she said, stopping at the turning from the sands, and waving her hand haughtily, "you are not the devoted friend to Cecil that I imagined you to be. There is not a word to be said against my son, yet you set yourself against Cecil's following the dictates of her own heart, and listening to the avowal of his affection. You would rather encourage the advances of an affected coxcomb like Mr. Vivian, who knows better how to pay court and deference to you."

There was open war between us now, and Mrs. Egerton could be very insolent when she liked. I had heard that before, I was proving the fact at this moment. Her conduct was so lowering to herself, that I did not feel even hurt by it, and her loss of temper was a safeguard for the preservation of my own.

"There is no necessity to discuss the subject further, I think, madam," was my reply,

"I am under no obligation to explain my conduct to you, and your opinion is naturally a matter of indifference to me. If this conversation is to be revived, I would refer you primarily to Miss Claridge, who will be best able to account for what touches her so nearly. I bid you, therefore, good afternoon."

But something in my words had awakened a misgiving in my companion's mind, and she looked round hastily, while an upmaking smile struggled feebly on her face.

"Nay, we must not part thus, Miss White," she said, extending her hand, "we are too old friends to quarrel on such slight grounds. Come, I am honest, and confess to feeling a little too keenly sometimes—a mother's heart, you know—and I am apt to speak hastily. But let the past be forgotten between us, and never alluded to again, either to ourselves or others, promise me."

And she spoke in a soft, half bantering tone.



I gave her my hand and promise. I had no ill-will to her, and I knew what was her object—she did not wish Cecil to be aware of our conversation. And I had no intention to breed ill-will by telling her. Even when Captain Leopold made his appearance on the shore that evening, walking with Charlie and Susan, I preserved my promise inviolate, and let him meet Cecil as and when he would. I was resolved that he should have that fair play which is a jewel.

Rejoining Cecil, and finding that it was approaching teatime, we shouldered our campstools and started for home. We were fated, however, to meet the Vivians before we reached our lodgings. There was a sound of wheels behind us, two little dogs jumping uproariously at Cecil's side, and the pony carriage drew up close to us on the pavement. George's fingers played about his watch chain I fancied rather nervously, but his father was as collected and self-possessed as ever. He

began speaking to Cecil, even regretting (as if the refusal had been a mere accident) that she had been unable to drive with them.

"The country was looking so lovely, could not she come to-morrow?" he asked.

Cecil had not forgotten our conversation of the morning, as I learnt by her crimsoning cheek, and in caressing the dogs she strove to hide the awkwardness of her refusal.

"I really think you must have taken fright at my ponies, Miss Claridge," the Captain said, "but I do assure you they are as quiet as possible and perfectly to be trusted when the reins are in George's careful hands. And of course he would exercise double precaution when the freight is so precious," the Captain added with a gallant smile.

Poor Cecil, her eyes were being gradually opened to the state of the case, and if Captain Vivian's words had failed to lay the truth before her, there would have been no mistaking the anxious, disturbed glance

which George stole towards her and the varying expression on his face.

"Thank you, I'm sorry, but it is impossible—we really cannot, can we, Miss White?" Cecil stammered with an awkward appeal to me.

I felt Captain Vivian's keen, brown eyes resting upon me, trying to read every thought as it crossed my brain. I coloured under his glance and looked as confused as Cecil did.

"Oh yes, quite impossible," I said desperately.

"Miss White will not allow me the pleasure of her society when I have thought so much of it?" Captain Vivian said in a low, persuasive voice which only reached my ear.

What did the man mean, was he trying Mrs. Egerton's plan of winning me over for Cecil's sake? I do not suppose that Captain Vivian had often had a *no* from a woman when he spoke to her in that tone; but he

was not now what he used to be, and besides his self-interested motive was evident to me, and I turned round ungraciously and pretended not to hear.

"We shall be keeping tea waiting, Cecil," I said.

She started, and gave a parting caress to the nearest dog.

Captain Vivian said, "you almost spoil the terriers as much as I do, Miss Claridge."

She made some incoherent answer about their being dear little things, bowed and passed on.

"Oh, Mimi, what shall I do?" she exclaimed to me in a breathless sort of way when we were beyond hearing.

And I could only answer: "Nothing, dear, but be very calm and prudent."

## CHAPTER XIII.

## A REJECTED GIFT.

"The shadows of our own desires stand between us and our better angels, and thus their brightness is eclipsed."

DICKENS.

THE next morning as I was sitting in the drawing-room, writing a long letter to Salome, I heard a pattering of little feet up the staircase, a scratching at the door, and in another second Cecil burst in with a face the colour of crimson, followed by the smallest and prettiest of Captain Vivian's little dogs.

She had a note in her hand, but she was tearing it passionately into fragments, and now flung them within the grate. The dog

danced round her in canine ecstasy, shaking a little morsel of her dress between its shining teeth ; but Cecil took no notice of it, only wrung her hands as if in the greatest tribulation.

“ My dear child, what is the matter ? ” I exclaimed, starting from my chair.

“ Oh, Mimi ! that horrible man and this nasty dog, I think I shall go wild ! ” and she literally stamped on the floor.

I asked for an explanation, and she gave it me incoherently enough. Captain Vivian had presumed on her admiration of his favorites to request her acceptance of Fly, accompanying the donation with a tenderly worded note of which I should well have liked to have had the benefit, had not its fragments denied rearrangement, and the emergency of the moment rendered Cecil's memory treacherous. She could only tell me that it was very affectionate, and referred in a meaning sort of way to George, just as though there must be an understanding between the two.

Cecil was inexpressibly annoyed, and no wonder, for it was a most awkward business. The idea of George Vivian's devotion had been so long in dawning on my mind that I felt conscious our previous conduct might well be misconstrued into encouragement, and truly I liked the youth so much individually that I felt quite grieved to bring sorrow upon him, and would fain have spared him any pain that I could. I was by no means partial to Captain Vivian, and I felt the intricacy of the case to be a good deal increased by his having mixed himself up in it. And Cecil's fortune was a dangerous bait. Unfortunately Mr. Scott had left Redcar or he might have come to our assistance, but he had returned home a fortnight ago, and we had no other friend on whom we could rely.

"What is to be done, Mimi, I can't keep the dog?" said Cecil desperately, sinking into the seat at my side.

The dog tried to jump into her lap, but she thrust it from her with the only harsh ges-

ture I had ever seen her bestow on child or animal. She had usually such a tender love for every kind of helplessness.

The little creature turned plaintively to me, with a mute entreaty for my interference. I put out my hand and it crept fawning round me, gazing up at me with soft gazelle-like eyes which made me shudder, for they seemed to have something in their expression akin to the softness and tenderness in George Vivian's own. One traces such likenesses sometimes, and painfully, even in dumb animals.

"Tell me, Mimi?" Cecil reiterated anxiously.

"Of course you can't keep it, dear child," I said decidedly, "and you must lose no time in returning it, and that there may be no mistake send a note by the servant at the same time."

"But what can I say?" groaned Cecil piteously.

"That you are sorry you are unable to accept Captain Vivian's kind present, but you



could not for a second think of depriving him of his favorite."

"Then he would over-rule my objection and send it back again ; I know he would, Mimi !"

"Well, then don't state a reason at all, you have no obligation to do so. Say you can't accept it. He is too much of a gentleman to force a thing on you against your will."

Cecil rose and collected her writing materials. But for at least half an hour she sat balancing her pen without commencing the note.

"Come, do make haste, Cecil," I said ; "every moment you delay increases the difficulty."

She dipped her pen in the ink and wrote a few, black-looking lines. When the *Cecil Clerveaux Claridge* was still wet at the bottom of the page she brought the note to me for inspection. After I had approved it she was going hastily to fold it up, but I remonstrated. I was too late, however, the writing was all smeared and untidy.

"You can't send such a thing, Cecil?"

"Oh yes, I will," and she thrust it into an envelope while something of her old smile crossed her face. "They may regret me less when they see what an untidy wife I should make!"

She rang the bell for the servant, and before he arrived, Cecil, for the first time, noticed the dog. Calling it to her, she stroked its glossy, black coat, and even bent down and kissed it. What a strange attraction there was about her, even for a dog! The creature nestled to her, licking her soft, white hands, and whined piteously when Carlton strove to remove it. The door closed after it, as it was taken away, and Cecil gave a sigh of relief, and began poking the fragments of Captain Vivian's letter between the crevices of the dry coals, as if anxious to bury the memory for ever.

"John always thought Fly much the handsomer of those dogs," she observed, after

a pause, during which her face had gained its usual serenity.

She had been thinking of John, and finding peace and happiness in the thought. Oh, loving foolishness of woman's heart!

We did not again revert to what had passed. I proposed going out, but she negatived the suggestion immediately; I daresay from a nervous fear of encountering the Vivians. I had some shopping, which could not well be deferred, and leaving her, intent on an enclosure for Salome's letter, I went out to execute the commissions. I must have been absent about an hour, when on my return, detecting voices in the drawing-room, and supposing them to be visitors, I turned into my room to lay aside my packages before entering.

Some one opened the drawing-room door hastily, and ran upstairs. I caught the disappearing skirts of Cecil's dress, and nearly ran against George Vivian, who was leaving

the apartment. I could not check an exclamation of surprise. He was the last person I had expected to see there.

He followed me back into the drawing-room, and as I glanced at him I saw that his handsome face had lost every particle of colour, and was contracted as if with pain. I felt sorry for him. One cannot help feeling sorry for the young, when they are in trouble, and I spoke quite softly when I remonstrated.

"How could you come here, Mr. Vivian?"

"Forgive me," he said, in a low, passionate tone that thrilled through me. "Forgive me, Miss White, it might be very foolish, but I could not help it, I wanted to know my fate from her own lips. Oh, what have I done that she should change so towards me? Miss White, you are her friend, will you not be merciful and help me?"

It was not so much the appeal itself, or the words in which it was couched, but the accompanying look and tone which moved me. By the very depth of his own feelings he

stirred my own. As in a dream there rushed back to me the memory of Robert Hinchcliffe's long hushed voice, and the glance of his eye meeting mine when he asked me to be his wife. As we two had loved long ago, so George Vivian loved now ; aye, and as my pitying heart remembered, loved in vain ! His was real, ardent love of Cecil for her own sake ; there was no thought of her fortune in his mind ; he could not have feigned that light in his eyes, no seeming could have made his voice tremble so. It was for the individual, Cecil Claridge, not for her place or position, for her wealth or her influence, that he pleaded so passionately, only for the woman's heart of which he had probed the depth, and value, and loveliness. It was a hard and bitter thing to turn away from the offering of a pure faith like that, but alas, Cecil Claridge loved another !

I had liked John Phillips from a child, and I was happy to think of him as the probable husband of my darling ; he was not unworthy

of her ; at the same time I was not blind to George Vivian's merits. I do not think I loved him one iota less ; perhaps, individually, I admired him more than his friend, and I grieved as I watched his manly agitation now, and listened to the confession of his attachment. For, standing by my side there, he told me, as he might have told his mother, of the bright hopes he had cherished, and the happiness that had dawned gradually on his life, to be thus rudely torn from it. That his had not been a very happy past I could easily conjecture ; he had not been thrown much into female society, he had no mother, and this first woman friend had gained an influence and ascendancy over his heart which was almost unaccountable. She was his first love. Oh, there is a great deal in those words ! How many fresh, young hopes and holy aspirations, how much of romance, which seems to us, in after years, foolishness, though in its present it has such a peculiar charm, live in them ; what trust in mankind, what faith in the future,

what confidence in the feeble, fluttering emotions of our own poor hearts ! Many a thing we forget in after life ; the impress of faces and features ; the tones and inflexions of voices die from our memory, but there ever remains the first and deepest stamp from the associations that wove themselves into our life, the battles which seared our hearts, a first temptation which taught us truth, a self conflict which settled our principles, a first love which refined our spirit ; and the looks and the words and the faces of the actors in that early scene rise as prominently before us in old age as if we had gazed on or listened to them only yesterday.

“ Oh, Miss White ! I know I am not worthy of her, but I would sacrifice my very life to increase her happiness. She should ever have my first thought and affection. If unchanging love could satisfy her, she should never regret the day she became my wife.”

“ I know I am not worthy ! ” It is ever the first thought of a true heart in moments

like these. Cecil had said the same to me only yesterday. But then she alluded to John Phillips, not to George Vivian—alas !”

“ I did once hope that she cared for me,” poor George groaned ; “ but she has changed so in the last few days. I must have done something to forfeit her affection—will you not tell me what it is, that I may try and rectify it ?”

Though my heart bled for him, I had no alternative but to tell him the truth. “ There has, I fear, been a grievous mistake somewhere, for Cecil never has cared, and never can care, for you as you describe. Has she not told you so ?” I enquired, for I guessed that they must have discussed the matter before Cecil would have taken to flight as I had seen her do.

“ She hardly let me mention the subject,” George answered, “ but she said as you do, that it was all in vain for me to care for her, and that she was sorry ; but, Miss White, there might be a misunderstanding somewhere, either I have disappointed her or



something. Is it too late to repair what is past?"

That he had not a suspicion of her affections being otherwise engaged struck me forcibly, and with a little astonishment, considering how constantly he had seen Cecil and John Phillips together, and I wished that Cecil had given me authority to impart to him so much of the truth as might be necessary; but I could not breathe it without her permission, and George Vivian's unsuspicion left no opening for a hint.

"Don't say there is no hope," he exclaimed. "I will do anything—wait any time—strive to render myself more worthy of her—win her at last by patience and forbearance, and the might of my own love—"

"Hush!" I murmured in a low voice; "it would be all in vain. For her sake as well as for your own, be brave and try to forget her."

"Forget her—never!" he returned passionately. "I," and a strange light kindled in his

brown eyes; "I am not one to forget so easily. What Cecil Claridge is to me now, she will be to me on my death-bed!"

Did he speak prophetically? I felt my blood run cold and my pulses quicken. I glanced at him, and our eyes met; there was sorrowful regret in mine—passionate despair in his. And so for a moment we stood in silence.

I spoke first. "Do you know what is the first object of Cecil Claridge's life?" I asked.

He started visibly, and answered "No."

"To do her duty towards God and man," I said; "if there be true sympathy between you, you will strive to do the same."

"I do," he said, while his eye softened, and his tone had the accent and earnestness of truth.

I had been striving to bring him back to a calmer and holier state of mind, and I had succeeded. I was very grateful for that success.

"I have but one thing more to say ere we

part," I continued, "and you must make allowances for an old woman's love of talking if I trouble you in listening; but believe me, I wish you well and have your happiness very deeply at my heart. I want to tell you of a lesson that I have learnt slowly and painfully in my own life—that there is but one thing which can really sully the purity of human love—namely, human selfishness. Our self interferes with our devotion, and frequently mars the noblest offering of our lives. You say you love Cecil Claridge—prove it by preferring her happiness to your own—by blessing her by your silent forbearance and the sacrifice of your own will. You will be a true lover if you do this; now do not answer me, but good bye, and God bless you."

I stretched out my hand towards him, and he took it and wrung it warmly. My eyes were hazy with tears as I turned away my head.

Had I been hard upon him, too exacting, had I laid upon him a task that I could not

have performed in my own youth? I almost feared so as I stood at the window after he left me, listening to the hoarse murmur of the waves on the shore. It is easy enough to talk of self-sacrifice, but oh! how difficult a thing it is to accomplish. Who has strength of mind to close his ears to the syren's voice, when she sings to us sweet songs of the past, to shut out the memory of a tender voice or the thousand plaintive recollections which stir the heart, to sacrifice every thought and feeling, as well as openly and nobly to resign our own will; to give our hand to our rival and pray for *her* happiness for *his* sake—to rejoice with our neighbours without murmuring for our own lot—to come out from *ourselves* and forget them? Oh, God! it is a hard lesson and without we resign ourselves first of all to Thee we can never hope to make any after sacrifice for others.

## CHAPTER XIV.

## A SACRIFICE TO THE DARK SPIRIT OF THE PAST.

"Smooth dissimulation, skill'd to grace,  
A devil's purpose with an Angel's face."

COWPER.

GEORGE VIVIAN loved Cecil better than himself, and would not have shrunk from the path of self-sacrifice which I had pointed out. But his father was urged to seek the alliance from more mercenary motives; he knew the extent of Cecil's fortune and estimated her accordingly. His own life had not been over scrupulous, and his strong, passionate will had generally enabled him to surmount all obstacles. As long ago he had planned for

himself, he now planned for his son. Bad as he was, he had a selfish fondness for the youth; he was proud of him, and he thought to testify his love by heaping up riches and honour for him, and providing him a position of unbounded wealth and influence. His own fortune was very extensive; if he secured Cecil as his son's bride, their united rent roll would be a princely inheritance for future generations. He had laid his own plans weeks ago; they were cleverly designed and had been worked by a masterhand.

Accidentally he had learnt the name and parentage of his opposite neighbour; he needed to ask no more for he knew as much of our concerns as we did; and when he summoned his son George to Redcar it was to set fire to a train which he had laid with elaborate skill and caution. He estimated Cecil at a certain personal value as clever and high-spirited; he rather liked her for herself when he made her acquaintance; when his son loved her, he cared for her on that account.

The thought of her refusing a handsome, agreeable man of his son's prospects never crossed his mind; it was almost too good fortune for her to have the offer of him, so he considered; and when the fact of her having refused George reached his ears, he was transported with rage, and vowed vengeance. But he never for an instant swerved from his original intention. Cecil should still be his son's wife, and so in bitter language he told that son, paying no attention to his protestations and remonstrances. She should marry him of her own free will, Captain Vivian said, and can we wonder that George lent a ready ear when his father spoke of the caprice inherent in woman's nature, and treated this first refusal as merely an illustration of girlish wilfulness?

"You know that you love her and will make her happy, you're a romantic young dog as ever lived. Well then I promise you that she shall be yours of her own free will and accord before many days are over. They

leave Redcar the week after next, so there is no time to lose, only while I bring matters about you had better be out of the place. Suppose you go to the Lakes."

And George Vivian did go away and his father arranged his scheme, to bring alas! what sorrow and heart burnings on us.

Six days later Cecil said to me in a hard, cold voice that she had passed her word to Captain Vivian to become his son's wife.

We were standing together in the little dining room which had just been freed from Captain Vivian's presence; two of his servants were even now accompanying him across the street. I had not been present at this or any of the previous interviews which he had sought and obtained with Cecil; but I had gathered enough from the circumstances connected with them to be sure that they had some deep and mysterious connection with the past, that by some bygone knowledge this cruel man was seeking to influence the



mind of my poor darling. Alas! though I had questioned and implored her she would tell me nothing; she never reverted to anything he might have said or told her, he had had difficulty in obtaining his first interview, but he had only to ask now and she saw him how and when he would.

I had been uneasy, but I had never dreamed of this unexpected conclusion, and when Cecil told me her decision I uttered an exclamation of surprise while involuntarily the name of John Phillips escaped my lips. Could it be possible that she had so soon forgotten him?

Anxiety had done its work on both mind and body during those few miserable days. Cecil's eyes were sunk and hollow and her complexion wore a sickly hue; long, restless nights and suppressed excitement had left their traces on her cheeks and brow.

She looked up at me with a pained, startled glance and her eyes dropped:—

"Don't speak of him in my hearing," she said in the same cold, unnatural voice, "I have nothing to do with him now."

"Oh, don't speak and look like that! What is the matter, Cecil?" I exclaimed.

"You had better not question me if you want me to preserve my senses," she said, with a wild gesture of her arms as she flung herself into a chair.

I went and stood close to her, letting my hand fall softly on her bowed head. We neither of us spoke for a long, long time. I could hear her hard, gasping breath, choked as it was with sobs which could find no relief in tears.

"Cecil," I whispered, bending down and pressing my lips to her forehead.

She tore herself from my embrace, and started into the centre of the room.

"There, there don't, you don't know what you are kissing!" and she wrung her hands wildly. "I wish I were dead and buried, and you had all forgotten me!"

I shrank back into my place, and watched her in terrified astonishment. She paced up and down the room for several minutes, breathless with excitement. I thought that perhaps if I forced her to speak to me, she would find words a relief, and I made no preamble but went straight to the point.

"You have promised to become George Vivian's wife?" I said.

She stopped short in her walk, and looked at me. I spoke quietly, as of a thing that was a matter of course, and my voice was perfectly controlled.

"Yes," she answered bitterly, "if he cares to have a heartless wife. I made it a condition that for his own sake he should know the precious gift he was accepting, a void, broken, crushed spirit, in place of a loving heart; he will have a rare bargain indeed—but I suspect it will not be a long one," and she lifted her hand wearily to her temple.

"When does he come home?" I asked.

"To-night, and to-morrow is Sunday. Ah,

well! Oh, Mimi!" and her voice was softer, "Why is one's duty so hard to do?"

"One's duty, dear?" I said curiously, "but this does not seem so much a case of duty. How can it be your duty to marry George Vivian? It is surely your own will."

"You don't know, you can't know," she murmured, "one's duty is sometimes very hard and imperative, and sometimes the performance of it breaks one's heart, as this will break mine."

"Poor child," I whispered softly, and then as a sudden impulse prompted me, I looked steadily in her face, and said: "Cecil, in this there must be no reserve between us; how much of the past has Captain Vivian told you? I know something of it, too."

"What do you know?" she shrieked. "Did he tell you? The coward! And he swore to me that if I kept my promise he would preserve his."

I began to guess how matters stood. "He promised that conditionally on your marry-

ing his son he would keep your father's secret?"

"Oh! Mimi, how do you know? Oh, don't speak of it; swear to me, bury it for ever. I will marry George Vivian, and then it will be their interest not to tell. People always are swayed by self-interest. I can't do more, but you will help me—oh! do, Mimi," and she grasped both my hands within hers, and held them as in a vice.

I could not speak for thickening tears, and she thought that I would not answer her.

"Will you too turn from me?" she asked bitterly, "have I not one friend in the world?"

"Two, so long as Salome and I live," I answered hastily.

"Salome!" Cecil shrieked out the name, "Oh! but I can never see her again, never look on her face. And when I think of her mother, no wonder this chastisement has come to my father's child! Visiting the sins

of the fathers upon the children, I never believed in that before."

I remembered the woman's words on the seashore and they gave me a clue to Cecil's secret.

"Salome's father died a perfectly natural death," I said, "and anyone who says to the contrary tells a fearful lie."

Cecil looked in my face with an eager, breathless glance, which could find no expression in words:—

"Can you prove that?" she gasped at length.

"I know one who can and will, for so she has passed her word to me. Now, Cecil, I have been open with you, will you not tell me all you know and let us plan together how this coming evil is to be averted?"

She hesitated for a second, and then sank down on her knees and told me the tale. Craftily and cruelly indeed had that bad man worked on her feelings. Much of what she repeated I knew already; it came home to me

when she breathed the name which Captain Vivian had formerly borne—*Rogerson*—yes, this was indeed the Captain Rogerson of poor Mrs. Claridge's trial! He had not hesitated to tell Cecil how her father had ruined James Fielding, though he had carefully screened himself from the charge of participation in the crime. He had painted Mr. Claridge's character and conduct in glaring colours; Cecil had known and remembered but little of her father; she heard him described as the veriest villain that ever existed, ay, darker, deeper the guilt, Captain Vivian stigmatized him at length as James Fielding's murderer!

The tale he told had an evident admixture of truth, and was powerfully rendered; he had shown Cecil certain papers in her father's handwriting, which seemed positive confirmation of what he affirmed. The motive of the act was self-evident. Edward Claridge had loved James Fielding's pure-minded, beautiful wife, and was resolved to win her at any

price, even at the price of his own conscience, and the risk of his life!

Cecil told me how she had read one note in which her father had desired his friend, Captain Rogerson, to procure him a certain quantity of some chemical preparation for which the object was unmistakable. Captain Vivian said that he had purchased the poison, believing that it was required to destroy vermin. But, two days later, James Fielding was a corpse, and there was no hesitation in the minds of his friend as to the instrumentality to which he owed his death. Edward Claridge had met him at the *fête champêtre* to which he had taken his little daughter; the two men had been together almost all the day, had eaten and drunk in company. Edward Claridge had had full opportunity for the perpetration of his dark deed—and Captain Vivian did not scruple to say he was a murderer!

He had told Cecil that affection for his once friend had hitherto kept him silent, and that



now her marriage with his son might effectually bind him over to secrecy; otherwise, and he swore a fearful oath, the proofs were in his possession and he would use them; he would proclaim to the world that Edward Claridge was James Fielding's murderer!

He had worked surely and certainly on the daughter's heart. She had been unable to trust anyone with the secret; she did not dare even mention it to me. She had not doubted when she fancied she saw the *proofs* before her; her whole life had been blighted by the revelation, and in last despair, to save her father and because it was her duty, she passed her word to become George Vivian's wife—if he cared to marry her when she could not give him her heart!

She had won the Captain's worthless promise of secrecy, and he had her troth; there was no other bond between them, there needed none, the daughter's lips were sealed when her father was a murderer! The sacrifice of her heart and hopes was the price my poor

Cecil had resolved to pay for her father's honour!

We stood holding one another's hands and weeping together. I had told her there was still a chance of escape for her; I had urged her to brave Captain Vivian and let him do his worst; but she shrank from the idea as it seemed to breathe danger to her father; her only thought seemed to be in identifying her honour with that of George Vivian, and so securing his father's secrecy. My heart revolted against the notion for George Vivian's own sake, and I said so.

She smiled sadly and bitterly. "His father says that his affection for me is too deep to be influenced by anything that is past; and be assured, though the truth cannot be revealed to him, it shall be of his own accord that he chooses a heartless bride."

She urged me to tell her all that I knew of Mrs. Claridge's and her own mother's history, and I did so without reservation. She knew so much now that nothing could deepen

the impression, and besides it was only prudent that she should be informed of the truth. Cliff had arrived a few hours before, and at Cecil's request, we summoned her to the dining-room, and made her repeat her version of the story. Poor old woman, she gazed half-reproachfully at me as she answered Cecil's questions ; she seemed to think I had betrayed her confidence. She was tried and trustworthy, and I was glad when Cecil made a friend of her, and laid the state of the case before her, asking for her counsel. Many and bitter tears she shed as she listened to the recital, but at the mention of the woman in black she displayed unwonted interest. The stranger had said that she could prove the truth with regard to James Fielding's death—where was she, that we might gain her assistance ?

Where was she, indeed ? It was the very question I was asking myself. On finding her and bringing forward her evidence depended our only hope of circumventing Captain

Vivian ; but we neither knew her name nor her residence, and since the night of our mysterious meeting on the shore, I had never once seen her. What was to be done? I wished Cecil had confided in me earlier, before she pledged herself to become George Vivian's wife, and made the preservation of her father's secret the condition of her sacrifice.

Against the young man himself, I could urge nothing. I believed him innocent of the fraud that was carried on for his sake, really attached to Cecil, and calculated to make her happy. I had liked and admired him as George Vivian, it would have been unjust and dishonest to hate him merely because he had the misfortune to be Captain Rogerson's son. And after all, could Edward Claridge's daughter reproach any one?

We sat and talked till far into midnight, but we could come to no conclusion. Cliff remembered how Mr. Scott had helped her mistress in her trouble, and I persuaded Cecil to write and ask him to come to us at once.

But it was too late to post the letter, and it lay sealed and directed on the table beside us.

Cliff and I formed plans for seeking out the stranger. We settled each to go to a different church to-morrow, and observe the respective members of the congregations, if possibly she might be amongst the number. We arranged how, if detected, we were to follow and question her. There was no time to lose. But we had some wearying anxiety before us yet!

## CHAPTER XV.

## COATHAM CHURCH.

"Believe me, upon the margin of celestial streams alone  
those simples grow which cure the heartache."

HYPERRION.

"Strong reasons make strong actions."

SHAKESPEARE.

"Adversity is the trial of principle. Without it a man  
hardly knows whether he is honest or not."

THE morrow came—a pouring wet day. Cecil had a headache, and I persuaded her to lie in bed ; she would not care to go out, and it was well to have a legitimate excuse for refusing to see visitors. The church bells began, and

Cliff started for Coatham, I for the Parish church. We met again after service with alike blank faces, for neither had made any discovery.

I hurried up to Cecil's room, and was there when the front door bell rang. Hannah came up to tell me that Mr. Vivian was in the drawing-room and anxious to see me. I asked her if she had remembered to say that Miss Claridge was confined to her room with headache, and she told me "yes."

"Kiss me, Mimi," Cecil said feebly as I was leaving the chamber.

I came back and bent over the heavy, aching head which she lifted from her pillow. I knew she was feeling very nervous and anxious, and I promised to return as soon as my visitor left me, and tell her all that had occurred.

George Vivian came to the door to meet me, his handsome face glowing with animation. I fancied he glanced beyond me, as though expecting to find some one else.

"Cecil is only very poorly," I said, "I persuaded her not to get up."

"Oh! I am so sorry," he began in a tone of real feeling.

And he looked eager for further particulars, perhaps a message from her.

But I only gazed round at the rain beating against the window pane, and pretended to shudder as my eye fell on the fireless grate.

"How very cold it is," I said.

He grew nervous and constrained immediately, and merely responded—"Very."

I was in no humour to talk to him, and so I think he felt, and I was resolved, if possible, not to allude to the object of his visit. His nervousness happily assisted me, for it made him unwilling to bring forward the subject.

He regretted not seeing Cecil, and asked if she would be disengaged to-morrow morning. I said I thought so if her headache were better, and he rose to take leave.

Just in parting he drew a letter from his pocket.



"John Phillips has written me such a famous account of his visit to Winchester. I thought Cecil—" he stammered— "Miss Claridge might like to see it."

"Oh! thank you; perhaps she would another time, but she is not equal to reading to-day."

And I did not offer to take the letter. He looked disappointed, and restored it to his pocket.

"I hope she is not really ill?" he questioned.

His anxious glance into my face almost moved my pity. I set his mind at ease in a few words, and followed him to the door.

"Oh! why didn't you bring me that letter, Mimi? I would have given anything to have seen it," Cecil exclaimed, with sparkling eyes and a heightened colour, as, standing by her bedside, I described to her my interview with George Vivian.

"My dear, how could I?" I remonstrated, "you would not prematurely accept a civility

from Mr. Vivian, neither would you wish to betray your interest in John Phillips."

"Oh! he would never have suspected anything; and I should have seen his handwriting, and heard all about *him*—and perhaps, Mimi, there was a message in it to myself—oh! why didn't you bring me the letter?"

I looked at her with a keen, searching glance.

"Cecil," I said, gravely, "are you still resolved to become George Vivian's wife?"

She cowered under the bed-clothes, and hid her face, but I could hear her sobbing. When I asked her a second time, she said "yes," in a stifled voice.

"Then you have no legitimate interest in John Phillips. You must put the thought from you."

"But I can't," she said hoarsely, "it has taken root in my heart. I can never forget him, whatever I do."

"And knowing this you can commit the

injustice of becoming another's wife? Child, it is not worthy of you, it must not be."

"Captain Vivian knows all," she whispered, "and forces me into it, in spite of that knowledge. And I am doing it for my father's sake. God will be merciful to me in consideration of the motive."

"God never blesses an unhallowed union," I said sternly. "Have I not heard you say a thousand times that there must be no doing evil that good may come? No, Cecil, my mind is made up; you have been frightened into this promise; withdraw it before it is too late, and cast yourself on George Vivian's generosity, telling him all. I am much mistaken in him if after that he hesitate to release you."

"Tell him about the Past, proclaim to him that Papa is——Oh! no, Mimi, I might stir up his revengeful feelings, he might — far better I should break my heart than bring such remorse on my conscience."

"You will bring still greater if you let this go on, Cecil. The knowledge of your secret will weigh you down to the earth, and your misery must inevitably extend to your husband also. For his sake as well as for your own, I urge you to the confession."

I pleaded with her with heart and soul, for I felt that I was pleading with her for the very peace and happiness of her life. For hours I stood by and prayed her. One by one I cast down her objections and strove to remove her fears. I knew that my best hope was to make her act on the impulse of the moment, and when I had once wrung a promise of acquiescence from her, I persuaded her to rise and dress herself that she might accompany me to Coatham Church in the evening.

The rain had cleared away with the turning tide. I guessed we should meet George Vivian at church, and in coming home he and Cecil could easily be provided with an opportunity for their explanation. Cliff went to take my place at the parish church, and when

service time approached, Cecil and I started for Coatham. She was looking pale and harassed, and leaned heavily upon my arm. We were in good time, and took a seat half way down the side aisle. We were its only occupants, and when a few seconds later George Vivian came up and recognised us, and made as though he would have appropriated the place beside me, I moved aside and permitted him to seat himself close to Cecil. The child herself turned her eyes upon me with reproachful wonder, but I could not help it, some impulse prompted me to show George Vivian that one proof of interest and consideration before I assisted in blighting his hopes for ever.

He looked grave but perfectly happy and contented; only once when his eye fell on Cecil's anxious countenance his brow contracted painfully, and I heard him sigh. Did his heart misgive him as to his ability to secure her happiness?

Every little incident of that evening ser-

vice is written on my memory as with a pen of iron. Even as I tell the tale, I can recall the thrilling tones of his magnificent voice, as it pealed forth in the *Deus miseratur* ; like little Ruth I felt something strangely stirring in my heart as I listened ; perhaps it was the consciousness of how much we needed God to be merciful unto us and bless us just then, how much George Vivian, himself, would require to be led by the light of His countenance along the dark way which he was unwittingly entering !

We had no hymn-book, and George found the place in his, and passed it to Cecil. She could not refuse to share it with him, and I saw the two hands only separated by the little leathern-backed book—the two pair of eyes bent on the same words, and drinking in their sense at the same time. I heard the two voices chiming, but the two hearts — !

The words of the hymn are even strange to look back upon now. I shall never hear them again without brimming eyes—

"Come let us join our cheerful songs,  
With angels round the throne;  
Ten thousand thousand are their tongues,  
But all their joys are one."

When the text was given out, as was my wont, I placed a pencil mark against the reference. It is there still, and the words come home to me with renewed teaching. "In the multitude of the sorrows that I had in my heart Thy comforts have refreshed my soul." Ps. xciv., 19. (Prayerbook Version.)

The sermon was over, the hymn sung, and now the blessing was given. George and Cecil were kneeling together, and methinks that it fell upon them both there—that peace of God which passeth all understanding — and the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, to be amongst them and to remain with them always!

They rose up after that short, solemn lull for heart prayer, and followed me from the building. I led the way towards the shore, and they walked together by my side in perfect silence. We had reached the sand hills;

the sun was sinking far away in the west, tinging the sea waves with a golden light, and I withdrew to a little distance and left them together.

The marks of the fallen rain were still visible on the sands beneath my feet; it was caked heavily together and perforated with a thousand holes; and the air had the coolness and freshness that follows wet. I stood watching the varying lights on the sea—watching them one by one fade and die out, and the grey hues of night steal over the scene; and just hidden by that steep sand hill with its clustering, breeze-stirred rushes. Cecil was throwing herself on George Vivian's generosity, confiding to him the sorrow of her life—poor child! with what success?

It must have been a full hour later when he came up and stood beside me. Cecil was not with him. She was standing on the rising ground behind with her back turned to us. I looked in his face and found that though



ashy pale, it was still and passionless. He stretched out his hand, and I gave him mine.

"Cecil has told you all?" I asked. His eyes met mine gravely, but there was no anger in them.

"She has, and in a way that does her credit. We understand one another perfectly now, and I trust that I may effectually screen her from the sorrow which I and mine have brought on her. How much I regret the past it were in vain to attempt to tell you, but," and his voice trembled, "there has been a grave misunderstanding. I was near doing her great wrong, but believe me it was unwittingly, and that no effort on my part shall be spared to atone for it. Much indeed is irremediable now; the knowledge which she has acquired under such painful circumstances will never be effaced. God help her, and forgive me, who have been the unhappy origin of her sorrow! Oh! Miss White, I did once trust that she cared for me; I hoped so for

myself, and others persuaded me of the fact; but we will not speak of it. I am powerless to try and comfort her now; for I must never see her again. But you will do your best for her, for my sake and for hers?" And he wrung my hand with violence.

I strove to thank him and tell him what I thought of the braveness and nobility of his sacrifice. But words failed me, and I broke down. All I could murmur was, "God bless you."

"He will," George said, with a bright glance upwards; "I know and feel it." And the last words I heard him utter were those to which we had so recently been listening: "In the multitude of the sorrows that I had in my heart Thy comforts have refreshed my soul!"

The broken ground quickly hid him from my sight as he hurried away, and I turned back and rejoined Cecil. She was forcibly impressed by George's conduct, and she did not hesitate to tell me so. I was glad to

gather from her that she had softened the sacrifice to him by her womanly appreciation of his great-heartedness, that they had parted in peace and with mutual esteem and confidence. He had been inexpressibly shocked and pained by the recital of his father's conduct—cruelly hurt and mortified; she told me that he could not conceal his agitation when he referred to it. But he had engaged himself for the preservation of that terrible secret, and prayed Cecil to set her mind perfectly at ease with regard to it.

But how could she, poor child? She felt as though the sword of Damocles were still pendent over her head, and she spoke of little else all the way home.

I own that I too was uneasy: I knew the treacherous and revengeful character of Captain Vivian, and did not suppose that even his son's influence would be sufficient to deter him from seeking our ruin, if our ruin, were indeed, as he protested, in his power!

## CHAPTER XVI.

## MOTHER AND SON.

"Death finds us 'mid our playthings—snatches us  
As a cross nurse might do a wayward child,  
From all our toys and baubles. His rough call  
Unlooses all our favorite ties on Earth;  
And well if they are such as may be answer'd  
In yonder world, where all is judged of truly."

OLD PLAY.

"WHEN may we go home, Mimi?" Cecil asked anxiously when we met the following morning.

I had anticipated her request and was prepared with my answer.

"There is but one consideration to prevent our leaving Redcar immediately, dear, and that is the necessity for finding the woman if

she be still in the neighbourhood. It is a great matter to be able to bring forward her evidence when needed, and I think we should leave no stone unturned to discover her whereabouts, and enlist her services. Besides, Mr. Scott will receive your letter to-day, and join us either to-night or to-morrow morning. I think it more than probable that the Vivians will be the first to leave the place."

We were out almost all the morning making enquiries in Coatham and Redcar about the mysterious stranger, but alas! without any successful result. The woman at the workshop remembered a lady, answering our description, who came in very early one morning to purchase canvass, but she did not know where she lodged and she had never heard her name; the errand boy at Dove's had met such a person out on the sands a fortnight ago when it was growing dusk, and was quite certain that she walked towards Coatham; we could make no definite discovery, and came home at dinnertime weary and disheartened.

Nothing had been seen or heard of the Vivians all day, no message had passed between the houses. But now as I went into my bedroom to wash my hands I saw the Captain sitting out on the balcony as usual. His large green and black shawl was festooned about the easy chair, and the two little dogs were begging for the morsels of biscuit which he was distributing to them. All during dinner as I occasionally glanced up I noticed that he was there still, and when afterwards, Cecil being engaged in letter writing, I returned to my room he was occupied in the same manner.

I found a book, but not being inclined to read I sat down in the shadow of the window curtain and watched him. Dislike him as I did, he was always in my mind invested with an unaccountable degree of interest.

Presently I discovered that something had gone wrong with him or his dogs, for his voice was raised, and I saw him threatening one of the little animals with the heavy whip that

lay across his knees. He had raised it and was striking the offender. I heard the lash descend and the dismal howl with which it was received.

The dog broke from him and darted in at the open window ; he was too infirm to follow it, and his curses were so loudly enunciated that they even reached my ear. I shuddered and crept further behind the curtain.

He was calling the dog ; whistling to it, I heard the name of John Phillips' favorite and Cecil's rejected gift repeated again and again, first in a threatening then in coaxing voice : " Fly, hi good dog, Fly, Fly ! "

For a long time the summons received no answer, but as the tones softened, a little silky, black head peered through the window, and the favorite stole gradually out, and with her feathery tail sweeping the balcony behind her, crouched down to her master.

He put out his hand and caught her by the collar, shaking her fiercely. His coaxing appellations had been merely a veil to bring her

within his power. They had deceived the poor brute, but then, as he had once said to us, these creatures were always so affectionate and forgiving, ay, and as my own heart added, so miserably unsuspicious, so almost *womanly* in their trust!

He shook the animal, and she growled and snapped at his fingers. He raised his heavy whip and struck her repeatedly, and her cries were piteous to hear.

The sun basked on the balcony, on the yellow washed cottages and slate roofs beyond; there was a broad shadow over half the street, and overhead scarce a cloud was in the deep blue heavens. It was a glorious August day.

There were few people astir in the street, almost every one was out on the sands; only a group of boys playing marbles on the pavement stopped their sport and looked up at the balcony, and two shrimp girls cried *shame* at the top of their voices.



The dog struggled to get away from her master, but he held her tightly, with one strong, sinewy hand, while the other dealt brutal blows on the poor writhing, prostrate form. He was kicking it now yet it hardly shrieked. Ah! it was moaning; but he did not stay his hand, and I heard the lash descend with a dull, hollow sound. I could almost have cried *shame* with the girls below me; my heart was crying shame with a vengeance.

Some passers had stopped on their way and were looking in wonder; but they hardly understood the scene, the dog had ceased to cry and nothing was to be seen but the infuriated man dealing forth blows at some indistinguishable object on the floor of the balcony.

One of the boys, moved with manly indignation, hurled a stone at Captain Vivian, and his example was immediately followed by his companions; quite a crowd collected below,

and handfuls of loose sand and rubbish, and a few heavy stones assailed the balcony from all quarters.

One pebble grazed Captain Vivian's cheek and shattered the pane of glass behind him; with a great effort he dropped the whip, and staggered through the open French window, at the very moment that a policeman made his appearance round the corner of the street.

There was a loud hum of voices on the pavement; the policeman was dispersing the boys, and they were striving to explain. But either they did not make good their story or were afraid of the policeman, or he shrank from investigating the matter; for quickly the crowd disappeared, the passers went their way, the sun basked full as ever on the balcony, and there was nothing to bear witness of the brutal deed which had just been perpetrated, but a black heap in the corner, and some morsels of broken glass on which the sunshine trembled and shivered.

I sat still, holding my breath, and feeling

quite sick with indignation. I thought how the little beast had crept up to my side but a week ago, licking my hands and gazing up at me with those strange lustrous, gazelle-like eyes, which made me think, despite myself, of poor George's sorrowful expression. And George's own father was the coward who could act thus !

It was but half an hour later when George himself came along the street, with some library books in his hands, and entered the house. Again five minutes, and he was out on the balcony lifting something from the corner—something black and inanimate. The sun shone on him and on it, on his luxuriant brown hair, on the dark object in his hand. Ah, he turned it over, lifted it up, and I could see it well—the dabbled coat, the contorted limbs, the small head hanging lifeless ! I knew what a film there would be over those gazelle-like eyes, and he was looking at it so pitifully. I covered my face with my hands to shut out the sight and literally groaned.

Ah, poor son, that might be a type to you of the tender mercies of the wicked !

When I looked again both had disappeared; on the balcony was only the tenantless arm-chair with the green and black plaid heaped over the footstool.

I heard wheels coming along the road ; it was the hour for their daily drive, and the pony carriage with its sprightly greys drew up before the Vivians' door. The groom stood at the ponies' heads, and it was necessary that he should do so, for the animals were fresh and spirited, and they were long kept waiting. I could hear their hoofs pawing the ground, and the soothing voice of the groom as he strove to quiet them.

At last Captain Vivian made his appearance, assisted by two servants. George was there, too, but evidently not regarded with his usual good favour, for I noticed that when he once came forward to help his father into the carriage, he was sharply and ungraciously repulsed, and that in presence of

the servants. Again, he was taking his usual place beside Captain Vivian when some angry words were addressed to him, and he quietly descended and seated himself in the small back seat.

The reins were gathered up and placed in Captain Vivian's hand, the groom mounted at his side, and they started. I came forward to the open window after they had passed; and when George Vivian turned and looked up at our house I caught his eye. There was no smile on his face but such a sad look of patient suffering. I think its expression will never pass away from my heart and memory.

A very few minutes later Cecil tapped at my door. "Didn't I hear the Vivians' carriage pass just now, Mimi?" she asked, "if so don't you think we might go out? My head aches so I quite long for a whiff of fresh air."

So she and I went together onto the sands, and walked a long distance in the Marske direction. We talked nearly all the time

about John Phillips. I encouraged her to mention him, and tried to appear unconscious of the efforts she made to prolong the conversation when at times it threatened to flag. Poor child, he was almost the only happy thought left her, no wonder she clung to him! When she spoke of her home plans she alluded to him; he and she had so often discussed the things together, and she had so jealously garnered up every suggestion of his to be worked out when she should have the power. They had talked about the church and parish, and he had mentioned the pain which the neglected state of both often caused his father. Cecil had intrusted me with the grand secret of how she was going to rebuild the church, and provide Mr. Anderson with a curate. Mr. Scott had listened readily to her wishes, and the estimates were being made even now; Cecil wishing the foundation stone of the new building to inaugurate her coming of age on the ninth of next month. The architect had objected to the site of the pre-

sent church, and a more central situation had been chosen. I wanted to ask Cecil something about it, and therefore I brought forward the subject.

My darling's brow contracted with evident pain, and she answered me with a sigh. "I am so glad, Mimi, that I never made my intention public, for now it must be deferred for the present."

I asked *why*, with no little surprise. When she told me I could only recognise the justice and right feeling of her resolution. Her father had deprived James Fielding's child of her inheritance; she must spare no efforts to restore it. The considerable sum which had accumulated during her minority, she had hitherto destined for the fulfilment of the bright day dreams which she had built up for her model parish; but now Salome Fielding had a prior claim, and Cecil told me that she was only awaiting her coming of age to make the necessary arrangements for investing it in her name. She wanted to discover all

about Craigmoor, in whose hands it now was, and everything, and if it would be possible to redeem it. But I could tell her nothing, and only suggested an application to Mr. Scott.

Afterwards we spoke of George Vivian, spoke of him with that low-voiced reverence with which one always reverts to the truly noble.

"I will never judge people by first appearances again," Cecil said, "for who would have supposed that one who seemed so young and thoughtless, so *small* in many things, could in a real emergency come forth with such glowing colours."

"John always said that he had the elements of great good in him, and ought to make a noble man."

"Ah! so he did; I wonder what his future will be; he deserves a bright one. I should like to look forward and know what he will turn out."

Look forward, indeed! It needed but a short vision. With him there was but an



easy transition to immortality, from the mortal sorrow to the immortal comfort. But how little did we guess this then !

“ I liked him very much as a casual acquaintance,” Cecil said, “ still more because he was John’s great friend. I admired his talents, in spite of their being often marred by his self-consciousness. He had trivial vanities which annoyed me sometimes, and I fancied that they showed the stamp of a petty mind. But he has proved that they were only an earthy formation, which encrusted the sterling worth of his character. Oh ! Mimi, he has acted gloriously throughout all this. John had a true estimate of him after all.”

I warmly agreed. I think my heart appreciated him even more highly than Cecil’s could do, for she was not unbiassed, and had no higher judgment to which to refer him than comparison with John Phillips’ very different character. The two could bear no comparison ; the one so open and truthful

and cordial, who in a happy home atmosphere had been trained to live a fair, fearless life, in the sight of man and before God; the other whose strivings after goodness had been none the less effectual for being hidden within his own heart and apparently blighted by surrounding circumstances. But God, who sees the heart, noted his difficulties, gave him strength, and taught him lessons of which we had no consciousness. When the time came for action he proved that he had learnt them by acting on them. And doubtless God is giving him his reward!

I dreaded to approach the subject which weighed so heavily on both our minds. But Cecil was relieved by talking it over, and we anxiously discussed the possibility of ascertaining the true facts of this past history; we had great reliance on the help which George Vivian had promised us, and we had not yet lost all hope of discovering the stranger woman, who also retained a clue to the mystery.

Cecil spoke of her father ; but the allusion was uttered in a low, tremulous tone, as if though still associated with love, it had a further connection with shame. Yet the pitying woman's heart triumphed over all ! She said that she alone was left to her father now and she must do her duty—no matter if others shrank from him, with God's help she would always remain at his side ; it might have been needful to separate them hitherto, but as soon as she was her own mistress, she was resolved to devote herself to him. Who could tend him like his own child ? She did not allude to the stigma attached to his name ; she evidently sought to thrust aside the notion as an evil imputation, and she did well. No one should give credit to the guilt of another until it be unmistakeably substantiated by proofs. By this means only do we preserve our charity and loving kindness.

We had turned the corner of the sand hills and as it was nearly high tide we were close under the banks. Now we were amongst the

moored boats, and immediately below the spot where formerly stood the Fisherman's Square.

There was a loud cry of terror echoed from some one on the bank beyond, a noisy sound of wheels, and in another moment the Vivians' pony carriage tore past us on the road above us, the greys dashing at full speed and as if impelled by terror of something that was pursuing.

The reins were under their feet, but the carriage had occupants—oh God!—and there the road ends precipitously, and they have passed the turning—they are at the brink—they have disappeared!

We heard the clatter of the overturned carriage and the shrieks of the crowd below.

In breathless terror we turned and hurried to the spot. The carriage was lying reversed, half way down the shelving bank, one pony crushed below it and evidently fearfully mutilated, the other was struggling to regain its footing.

A cluster of fishermen were striving to remove the carriage and release its occupants. The ground was soft and clayey, in that fact lay our hope, our only hope!

The groom had jumped out when he saw the fate that was impending, and he had escaped as by a miracle. He now hurried to the assistance of his companions. We had heard the bystanders cry to George Vivian to save himself in the same manner; but his father was unable to move, and moreover paralyzed with terror, and his son would not desert him in his peril. He stayed to share his fate; the last we had seen of him was when he leant over towards the front of the carriage, striving to extricate the entangled reins—ah, if he had only been in his usual place!

The bystanders were just lifting up Captain Vivian's prostrate form; the carriage had fallen upon him and crushed one leg, and his pale, senseless face was all smeared with mud when they turned it round—but he groaned; life was not extinct!

The force of the fall had flung George forward down the bank; it was the very soft ground—hope still! There were two men beside him, about to raise his head.

Oh! what a cry of agony, how bitter, how excruciating! And the woman in mourning, whom we had sought so long, and so hopelessly, thrust the lookers on away, and sank down by the body. Where she came from no one knew; we had heard her cry once before—when the grey ponies dashed over the cliff!

“Eh, she’s his mother, look ye,” said a woman in the crowd beside me—and truly they did seem mother’s hands which lifted up the mass of chesnut hair that covered the temple; surely only a mother’s ear could have waited so tremulously for the faintest breath from those closed lips?

We were close now; Cecil clinging to me in agony. George’s pale face was looking up to the heavens, and the sun was shining down on it. No feature was marred or hurt, the eyes

were still open, the cheek warm to the touch, yet there was a stamp over all which comes from no signet but that of Life's vanquisher—*Death !*

Softly the woman's arm stole under the drooping head and lifted it up. We all groaned as she did so, for warm blood trickled down her hand from a deep gash behind—drop after drop, falling and dyeing the stony pillow on which he had been resting—warm, red, human, life-blood !

There was a doctor bending over the form and examining it. The woman was glaring at him with hungry, eager eyes, as though she could read the truth ere it crossed his lips. It was short work ; he looked at the gash, held the pulse, passed his hand lightly over the face. The lines on the woman's hard, shrivelled countenance grew deeper and deeper as she watched him ! an ashy hue spread over her yellow skin, and her lips worked convulsively.

"Poor fellow," the doctor said ; "it must

have been instantaneous death;" and she gave a faint start at the sound of his voice, and her head dropped forward and fell senseless against the face of the dead. The lips almost touched—mother's and son's, in a first embrace, and the cruel August sun danced on them with a fierce glance.

I raised the woman's head and supported it in my arms, dashing cold water on it from a tin which a fisherman held for me. They were carrying the body away, and many gathered round me, questioning who was the woman, and what was her connexion with the dead.

I asked the doctor about Captain Vivian, and learnt that he seemed to have sustained small injury beyond the fracture of his leg; he had been taken home and was sensible now. Of course he had not learnt his son's death—that one being whom he did love; the evil intelligence had yet to be broken to him.

Some one asked what was to be done with the poor woman who lay senseless in my



arms. A servant of the Vivians was near, and denied her connexion with them; we did not know where she lived, and I desired that she should be carried to our lodgings. We had been seeking her for long, but we never dreamed to find her in this way!

Some fishermen lifted her on to a rudely-formed litter and carried her along the street. I walked by her side; Cecil hurried on to prepare a room for her reception.

“Who is she?” The crowd might well ask, and I too questioned—“Who is she?”

## CHAPTER XVII.

## A CHILDLESS MOTHER.

"Ah! surely nothing dies, but something mourns."

BYRON.

"Where all life flies, death lives."

MILTON.

"I would bring balm and pour it into your wound,  
Cure your distempered mind and heal your fortunes."

DRYDEN.

SHE was George Vivian's mother!

I learnt the truth as I sat by her bedside in the evening twilight. She had been the wronged, hardly-used wife of Captain Roger-son—the faithful guardian, the loving mother of that poor clay in the room opposite, where the white blind shrouded the window.

When her first paroxysm of grief had exhausted itself, she told me all; the mystery had been only maintained that she might bless and assist George Vivian, and protect him should danger threaten. But George Vivian was beyond human help and blessing now, and she had no further motive for concealment. She thirsted to hear all about him. She urged me to repeat to her the words he had casually uttered in my presence, to describe his looks and tones, to tell her every trifle with which he was associated. For hours I sat beside her, and told her all I could; she had promised me an after-explanation, and my descriptions seemed strangely to relieve and comfort her. I went back to the first day of our meeting, to his kindness to little Ruth, to his many proofs of consideration for his father, to his intimacy with us.

I did not mention his love for Cecil, but the woman brought forward the subject and asked me about it. How she came by her knowledge I had no opportunity of discover-

ing, but she seemed to be well-informed, and when she questioned me I told her the whole truth. I kept nothing from her ; I told her of George's hopeless attachment, of Captain Vivian's cowardly efforts to work on our fears, of his son's generosity and promise of assistance to us.

She had been sitting up in bed, her scanty grey locks straying over her shoulders, her emaciated hands tightly clasped together. I daresay she was not a woman of above forty, but care and sorrow had told heavily upon her, and made her appear far older. She had straight, regular features, and eyes singularly full of expression ; her tone of voice was refined and musical, while her choice of words evidenced a careful education.

"George promised to do his best for you," she said, in soft, tender accents ; "he loved this Cecil Claridge well, did he ? well enough to put her happiness before his own ? It takes a good deal of unselfish love to do that. Ah !

then, George's mother will redeem his pledge ; bring your chair nearer and listen to me.

“ If anyone had ever told me I should willingly assist Edward Claridge's daughter, I would not have believed him, for I hated the man ; he hurt me and he cruelly injured the only friend whom I ever possessed. But I have not forgotten how that girl stood by me with pitying eyes when I was in trouble ; how her truthful young voice offered me any assistance in her power. My heart yearned to her then, and I could not quite hate her when I learnt who she was, even though I strove to do so. I noted the suspicion which I had raised in your mind, and I avoided you, but my sole object in life was to keep my son in view, and he was constantly in your society, and you seemed to have a mutual interest in one another ; no wonder mine extended to you for his sake. Do you remember the evening when you sat out on the sands talking with Mr. Scott ? I had been watching my son

as he walked up and down the shore with Cecil Claridge. You detected nothing in him then perhaps, but I did ; my heart told me that he loved her ; his very tone in addressing her seemed to me a confession of his attachment, his eyes spoke out the feeling whenever they turned towards her. You only read a friendly liking mayhap. I probed the truth, but no wonder, for I was his mother !

“I came and stood behind you when you were talking, and I overheard your conversation. I listened to it because inadvertently I fancied it had a reference to him. You spoke of Cecil Claridge, and you spoke of another. You surmised an attachment between the two, and rejoiced in it. You planned for their future.

“You praised Cecil Claridge ; I liked to hear that she was good and loving for my boy’s sake. I thought you appreciated him, and my heart glowed. I almost loved both you and your charge at that moment. But you went back to the past, and you spoke of

her who had been Salome Fielding—you told of her misery and broken-hearted death ; oh, why did you ? You stirred my very heart within me when you did so, for I had once loved her.

“ Women do not often love one another. Girls have foolish, romantic attachments, which die out in time ; a woman needs some very strong heart-bond to bind her to her fellow. Such I had to Salome Fielding. I will tell you all about it another time.

“ You detected me, but I made good my escape. We did not meet again till that evening on the shore when you had chased me from my position under the window, where I watched my dear one at his solitary reading. You remember our conversation. I fancied that you knew all when I told you that Edward Claridge was unjustly accused of James Fielding’s murder, and I guessed well then that you would need me, and we should meet again. Little did I suspect how soon ! As I stood beside you I longed, oh, so wearily,

to ask you about my boy ; it was something even to speak to a person with whom he had conversed. You fancied, I daresay, that I was moved to pity by your devotion to Cecil ! I was much more softened by the recollection that you were my son's friend.

“I had meantime made many inquiries about Miss Claridge ; I was jealous about any one who might become George's wife. Moved by irresistible curiosity, I left Redcar and visited Burton Abbots, anxious, if possible, to discover the character which she bore in her own neighbourhood. I lodged for three days in the village of Burton, and those three days I sedulously spent in visiting from cottage to cottage, and prosecuting my inquiries. I will tell you the truth, Miss White, I heard but one opinion of Cecil Claridge ; the people blessed her name as they would never have done had she been unworthy. One woman at a cottage door was nursing a young child, and when I questioned her, she pulled up the child's petticoat and showed me a little pair



of red shoes on the tiny feet, "Miss Claridge gived her them," she said, and that small incident decided me to come back with a peaceful mind. If Cecil Claridge had a heart to enter into the minutiae of every-day home life, to sympathize with a poor mother, and take thought for a little child, I could have full dependence on the purity and womanliness of her nature. I should dare even to trust her with my son's happiness. I could cast aside my great fear that she might inherit something of the hollow spirit of her father.

"I was staggered on my return by discovering my son's absence, and still more by his father's frequent visits at your house, but I had no suspicion of the course which affairs were taking; had I known the truth, I should not have hesitated to interfere; but I did not know. So the time passed on till yesterday, when entering Coatham church as service was commencing, I discovered your party just below me in the aisle. I stationed myself where unobserved I could watch you nar-

rowly. I saw all that passed, and in your faces I read a great deal which you little dreamed to be depicted there. For the first time I learnt that Cecil Claridge's heart was not given to George Vivian, and I knew the woman's nature well enough to guess at the agony which was bleaching her features and giving such deep shadow to her eyes. I saw that you were careworn and anxious, and looking back into my own heart I did not wonder, for there was plenty of trembling and fearfulness there, too.

"The love-light was still in George's eyes, and his brow unruffled, and bright visions of earthly happiness were floating through his heart. I would have died to have given him what he so much willed; I would gladly have yielded my whole existence for one of those earnest glances from which the girl at his side shrank so visibly. I felt bitter against her, jealous of her; she had my whole treasure, and did not value it; I, his own mother, had

not even one smile—do not wonder if I confess that I hated her at that moment!

“Yes, I hated her! My heart was burning and on fire; we women have such moments sometimes, when jealous passion overwhelms us, and we feel that either our heart’s desire must be given us, or we shall die! I remembered how he used to lie on my breast, long ago, a little helpless, unconscious babe, how he owed everything to me then and how tenderly and lovingly I nurtured him; now my love was not quenched nor alienated, but I was nothing to him, not missed, not needed; his whole thought was devoted to that cold-hearted girl, who had no spirit to appreciate his devotion.

“My will met my husband’s then; I said that despite herself, despite the world, despite everything, Cecil Claridge should become George Vivian’s wife. No matter her groans and sighs, and heartburnings, my boy should have his desire if human agency could effect it—what was her suffering to me in com-

parison with his happiness? Nothing, absolutely nothing!

“In this spirit I followed you as you left the church, and unobserved pursued you on to the sands. When you retired to a distance, nothing but a slight projecting bank hid me from your companions, and I heard their whole conversation. I heard Cecil Claridge’s confession, so womanly rendered; and my heart shrank from the tale of treachery which she unfolded—ay, shrank, rebelled, recoiled; for was not he who perpetrated the deed my own husband? Miss White, you know something of life and sorrow, but God grant that you may never realize the agony of watching those whom you once judged gods, to whom you rendered almost idolatrous worship, converted before your very eyes into devils. Wronged, embittered, abused as I had been by that very man, my love for him had never quite expired, I doubt if such love as I had bestowed on him ever does; one love only rose counter to it, over-

powered it, my devotion to his child who had once called me *mother*.

"I do not think human words could describe what I felt as I heard the tale of his father's treachery reach my son's ears, and saw his cheek blanch at the recital. Yet Cecil Claridge was not unmerciful; she spoke softly and without bitterness; had she exaggerated one particular or painted my husband's conduct in one too glaring colour, heaven only knows what I might have done, for I was nearly mad in my excitement.

"I waited breathlessly for my son's answer, and when it came, so pure, so unearthly in its abnegation of self, so tinctured with a high and lofty piety, I could only shrink, humbled to the very dust. I had been planning revenge for him—where was revenge in his heart? The true love there could give it no place. He spoke of his father in a trembling voice, but with accents full of tenderness, sad, pitying tenderness, such as an angel might testify to a fallen creature; yet with no up-

raising of his own self, nay, nor any thought of it, only the consideration of how he might save and shield his beloved one and give the fairest interpretation to his father's conduct. Do you wonder that I was proud of him, that my heart glowed, that in the rare consciousness and appreciation of his goodness I could even feel lenient to Cecil Claridge, and love her for his sake? I saw how matters stood and resolved that now should be my time for action. The explanation was in my power, and I had planned to seek out my son and make it to-night—*to-night*, but how little can we count even on an hour!"

She had laid back her head on the pillow and was moaning heavily, poor, tried, mother's heart! I pitied her truly, but what could such as I do for her? She needed Divine consolation rather than human pity!

With such poor words as I could find I soothed her distress, and whispered comfort to her spirit. I held her hands in mine and mutely caressed them. When she spoke again

of Cecil I left the room and summoned her; I thought, as indeed it proved, that her very presence would be full of consolation. George had loved and thought so much of her, it was natural that poor George's mother should turn and cling to her. I left them together. When I stole in again the poor woman had sunk into a quiet slumber, and Cecil's uplifted finger warned me to withdraw.

I went back to the drawing-room and rested myself on the sofa, musing sorrowfully on all that had passed. A servant had been despatched to make enquiries after Captain Vivian, and now returned with the intelligence that he was in a sad state of fever and delirium, the particulars of his son's death having been rudely revealed to him when he was in no condition to hear them.

I covered my face with my hands and cried softly for a long, long time.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

## THE THREE PROOFS.

"God in Thy mercy, keep us with Thy hand!  
Dark are the thoughts that strive within the heart  
When evil passions rise like sudden storms,  
Fearful and fierce! Let us not act those thoughts;  
Leave not our course to our unguided will.  
Left to ourselves, all crime is possible,  
And those who seemed the most removed from guilt  
Have sunk the deepest!"

L. E. L.

"How blunt are all the arrows of Thy quiver in comparison  
with those of guilt!"

BLAIR.

I FELL asleep at last, and must have slept for  
some time.

Cecil roused me by turning the lock of  
the creaking door.

I started up from my position on the sofa,



and pushed the hair off my forehead. The room was in total darkness, for my candle had burnt down in its socket, and the grate was fireless. Cecil came in without a light, but the open door behind her revealed the moonlight stealing through the uncurtained passage window and falling white on the opposite wall. Over the night stillness murmured the unceasing music of the waves, and the sound fell painfully on my ear.

"I hope I did not disturb you, Mimi?" the girl said gently, as she stole to my side.

I began to question about poor Mrs. Vivian in the next room, and Cecil told me how she had just been sent by her to entreat me to go to her. She had slept till within the last few minutes, when rousing and discovering the lateness of the hour, she had expressed sorrow for having wasted so much time when she had work needing her immediate presence. She must leave us with daybreak, she said, and she insisted on the necessity, despite Cecil's earnest remonstrances—"only she wanted to

see Miss White first—would she come to her?"

I went, and learnt that the summons was to listen to a tale of the past, which had its interest for both of us. She wished to give me the explanation that she had promised. Cecil had gone off to bed, and the woman and I were alone—I seated close to her pillow, the light from my candle falling fitfully on her drawn face.

"Wait a moment," she said, ere commencing; "give me that leathern case which you will find in my under pocket," and when I brought it as she desired, she pulled off the elastic strap, opened the case, and spread out its contents on the bed.

There was a strange collection of things. A half-dirty, discoloured child's sock, with a large hole worn at the toe; a small paper parcel, which had a greasy circle on it from the lock of silky hair inside; a scrap of paper, on which a child's hand had scribbled some unmeaning, crooked lines; one by one the

poor mother laid each of these aside reverently and continued her search. At last there were only three packages left on the coverlet—one small, square and heavy, with a printed label fastening it, while the outside paper was worn and stained, and bore an address and three lines of writing on the reverse side; the other, a lawyer-like roll, closely written, sealed, and attested; the third, a note, in a man's handwriting. She spread each open before her and began:

“To make my tale intelligible to you I must needs enter into some painful particulars of my personal history, and repeat things which I had never thought to breathe to a human being. Nothing but the urgency of the case could have induced me to the revelation, and in making it, I throw myself and my secret on your honour, to shield the one and preserve the other.

“I married in opposition to my parents' wishes. I was young and handsome at the time, and they were not satisfied that my

choice should rest on one, who, though generally popular and of good family, had but a small portion of this world's substance. For George Rogerson was then but a poor man, and generally supposed to be in involved circumstances. I had been a spoilt child, and I was a wilful girl; my fancies had never hitherto been thwarted, and my passions were strong and under little control. I was the less inclined to listen to reason or remonstrance, because my heart was for the first time touched, and I really cared for George Rogerson. Suffice it, that against the violent opposition of my friends, I married my lover and accompanied him when his necessities obliged him to seek a residence abroad. In marrying me he had thought himself secure of a liberal dowry, and great was his disappointment when my father, displeased and mortified by my conduct, refused me even a daughter's portion, and expressed his resolution to let me pay the penalty of my wilfulness.

“ But I knew nothing about money matters and I cared less ; I was aware, in so many words, that my husband had nothing or less than nothing, but I had been accustomed to lavish expenditure, and George, though surly and irritable sometimes about expense, placed no restriction upon me, and seemed rather intent on maintaining a first-rate establishment than on advocating economy. I enjoyed myself in the immediate present, and I took no thought for the future. I had been fond of society before my marriage ; I turned to it even more eagerly as my husband’s affection cooled and his love was alienated from me. I was quite a young girl, in a strange country, and with not a friend near me ; no one to care if I did right or wrong, no one to comfort me if I were in trouble, no one to say a word of counsel if I stood in difficulty. I had no happy thoughts, for my home was a blank to me, and even after my baby was born, much as I loved him, I could not bear to sit silent and companionless in his nursery, when old

memories of my past childhood, and brothers and sisters long alienated and neglected, but still dear from the scenes and the fancies, and the mutual interests with which they were connected, rose painfully and upbraidingly to my mind. We were in Paris, and I plunged into society and gave myself wholly up to enjoyment and pleasure. But you have nothing to do with all this—your interest in my tale begins three years later, when we had moved to Homburg.

“Why we went there I did not know; the place was not to my mind, and I pined for Paris and its feverish society, ceaselessly tormenting my husband to let me return there. But the business which he said took him to Homburg kept him engaged for months, and one day he quietly informed me that my extravagance had obliged him to seek employment in the place, and we must now make it our residence. I stormed and fumed; it was unjust to speak of my extravagance, for I knew that I had never been warned of the duty of

carefulness, and as I had never apprehended the necessity for caution, there could be little reproach to me if our money-matters were involved. I thought it was only an idle pretence on my husband's part to remain where he wished, and I combated his determination with womanly obstinacy.

“The discussion gave rise to the most serious quarrel we ever had. Hitherto, by some happy accident, our wills had not run counter, there had been no opposition; but now our interests clashed and we were both passionate and self-willed. I believe that if my husband had ever asked me to do a thing for his sake, I should have done it unhesitatingly, with real gratification that he judged me worthy of the request. Even now was not my love of society but a form of the yearning tenderness at my heart, which asked in vain for some one or something whereon to spend the energies which he despised? But he did not ask, he ordered and I refused, and sharp words passed between us, never to

be forgotten on either side. I gave in, of course, for my will was weaker than his, but I revenged myself for doing so by grasping every excitement within my power. There was plenty of society in Homburg, though not of the choicest description, and I mixed in it freely; my paltry ambition was to hold the first place there, to be the very foremost amongst the gay and admired. I had an object in doing this, which small and paltry as it may seem, yet bears a womanly interpretation—I wanted to gain general popularity, and by proving to my husband that others could appreciate what he held so lightly, by very jealousy to lead him back to his allegiance.

“You may be assured that I kept all of positive evil far away from my heart, but alas! I did not always shun the appearance of it, and there lay the danger, the great error of my life. One of my most devoted admirers at this time was Mr. Clerveaux Claridge. He was a friend of my husband’s, and somehow associated with him in money matters. We



lived in one of the gayest hotels, and he often found it agreeable to while away a few hours with us, when the sole penalty was playing the agreeable to a handsome woman. It was part of my husband's system, business, employment, I don't know what to call it, to encourage the coming and going of the wealthy English in Homburg, and to contribute to their entertainment whilst there. I had instructions oftentimes to pay peculiar court to this person or that, but I was self-willed and opinionated, and rarely acted save as my inclination prompted. I remember one autumn evening my husband returning home early, and telling me to order rooms for some friends of his who were visiting the place, and would spend the night at the hotel preparatory to finding lodgings elsewhere in the town.

"They came and I received them,—a short, fair-haired, sunburnt man, with pleasant blue eyes, a hearty manner, and that ceaseless flow of small joking conversation which so soon becomes wearisome. I had heard my

husband and Mr. Claridge sum up his character in two eloquent words, he was a *good fellow*. Oh, pity the *good fellows* who came to us ! He talked nonsense to me, and I rather liked him. But I looked coldly on his wife, who was too busy upstairs with her baby to come down to the drawing-room ; her conduct seemed a tacit reproach to me, as my little boy looked shyly through the open nursery door and called for his mamma, —ah, rarely indeed had his mother leisure for him !

“ At that very first interview I ran my eyes down the sweet, beautiful face, noted every point of form and feature ; I was not one to overlook beauty in any woman, more especially in a possible rival. And I had sense to feel that my own appearance could bear little comparison with one so perfectly lovely as Mrs. Fielding, and to judge that if she indeed became a resident at Homburg she could eclipse me, or might do so if she willed. Yes, this was she indeed whom you and I learnt,

in spite of ourselves, to love—Salome Fielding, afterwards the wife of Edward Claridge!

“Mr. Claridge had disappeared from Hom-burg before they made their appearance, but he did not leave until he had extracted a promise from me that his name was not to be mentioned in the presence of Mrs. Fielding. My husband gave me a like direction, testifying a good deal of angry annoyance when I refused to observe the caution, and obstinately insisted on knowing the cause for its necessity. Mr. Claridge told me at last himself; there had been some engagement between him and her previous to her marriage which had painful associations for both, and he did not wish to be brought in contact with her again, or even to be recalled to her memory. I looked at her narrowly after that, I could not understand how a woman, who had once been loved by Edward Claridge, could be happy as the wife of James Fielding. But she did seem happy and contented; she came often to our

rooms, winning the love of my little boy and the loudly expressed admiration of my husband; she mixed in society at Mr. Fielding's desire, and speedily made herself popular and beloved. There was no one like Mrs. Fielding, people said, and I sank into the second place, and hated her with all the rancour of a revengeful spirit. I was jealous of her in every way, jealous of her beauty and popularity, jealous of her influence over my husband, worse than all jealous of the childish love with which my own little son clung to her. I did love the boy; I loved him as I loved nothing and no one else. I had him constantly in my thoughts, and I wanted him, it was natural enough, to give me the first place in his young heart. But he was not accustomed to me, he could not understand my passionate affection; many a time he turned from me to run and climb up into Mrs. Fielding's lap, lifting his rosy lips for her to kiss.

"It was one night that returning from a large party where my worst feelings had been

stirred by the sight of that beautiful woman, the cynosure of all eyes, round whom my former friends were gathering eagerly, listening to her faintest remark, one striving with the other to anticipate her smallest desire, while I sat neglected in a corner, I, for whom this very crowd had done the same but a few months before, that pausing on my way upstairs, in a small chamber which my husband used for his private business, my eye was attracted by this note which lay open on the bureau. Captain Rogerson had but a moment before left the room; it was late in the night, the hotel was wrapt in slumber, my maid was waiting upstairs to undress me. He had gone in search of something that he required, and had left the bureau unlocked, the papers strewed about, and the candle flaring in the draught. I recognised Mr. Claridge's handwriting on the corner, and I opened and read the letter. I had been brought up with some few principles of honour, and for a moment I stood transfixed with horror. The

real nature of my husband's employment had never before dawned on me ; now I learnt that he was one of the paid emissaries of the gaming tables, and the letter before me pointed out Mr. Fielding to him as an easy and remunerative prey. It discussed the amount of his fortune, coolly alluded to his pliable disposition, and the certainty of a successful result when one so naturally weak was to be dealt with.

x      " But the letter had yet a deeper significance; for some unexplained reason, Mr. Claridge owed this unlucky man a grudge, and was bent on his ruin ; if my husband would secure that he said he would undertake on his own account to pay him a certain sum of money. There was a cheque attached to the paper, it was for the specified amount, and from it I concluded that the deed was accomplished, the pledge reclaimed, and James Fielding a ruined man ! I gathered up my gloves and handkerchief, replaced the papers and went up to my room. My teeth were clenched, my breathing

hard, I could have saved any other but I would not save Salome Fielding. I hated her ; I could be almost glad to think of her ruin.

“And she was ruined, and I moved no hand forward to save her ; she and her husband and child disappeared from the scene, and again I had the first place and the first consideration. But I was not happy ; all respect for my husband had passed from my mind ; I was always mistrusting and suspecting him, and I could not silence the upbraidings of my own heart when I remembered the past.

“Years passed over and we met again. We were in Paris, for my husband had a connection with one of the gambling houses there, and the Fieldings had regained their former position and Salome’s praises rang from everyone’s lips. And Mr. Claridge was in Paris too, meeting them constantly and treated as their best friend. I told you before of the imprudent line of conduct, which in my love of admiration and the desire of

rousing my husband's jealousy, I had adopted. I will enter into no particulars, I need only tell you that I was innocent of the foul stain which a slanderous world attached to my character—when the report came to my ears I did not think that anyone would credit it, how could they? But I forgot that my conduct had been open to misconstruction, and that I had made no friends that would stand by me in my trouble. Every one believed that infamous slander and shrank from me ; even my own husband, who ought to have known so much better, pretended to give it credence, and made it a pretence for the harshest treatment. In that hour of agony I thought my heart would have broken, I almost kneeled down and prayed that I might die, and they took my child from me—oh, how can I paint in words a sorrow no words have the power to express? \* \* \* \* \*

“But one person, and one person only, came near me in that hour of darkness, the



very last being whom I had expected to see—can you guess who it was? Salome Fielding crept softly to my side, and whispered that she did not believe the evil tale, and would stand my friend, and proclaim my innocence before all the world. You do not know what such a speech is at such a time, what her conduct was to me in my agony. Yet this was the woman I hated, wronged, cruelly injured—whom I had helped to ruin. I almost fell down before her and confessed what I had done. But the remembrance of my husband deterred me; I could not betray him or uncover his sin.

“I had now no limit for my love and gratitude to Salome Fielding; in my wild passionate revulsion of feeling I could willingly have died for her. I did say to myself that I would devote my life to shielding every sorrow from hers, and in the well-doing of the future would expiate the past—as if one could do such things, as if we could make expiation for anything past! Salome did

what she could for me, but not even she had power entirely to silence the calumny, and people were harsh enough to reflect on her for her Christian behaviour to me; so much so, indeed, that her husband at last put a stop to her communication with me, and with many tears and kind words she took leave of me, and again I was left to my miserable solitude. As I said before, my child had been taken from me and I was almost a prisoner in my own house; I dared not move out, and only vague rumours reached me of what was passing in the world. I knew by such means that James Fielding was gambling again, that people began to couple the name of his beautiful wife with that of Mr. Clerveaux Claridge in meaning accents, and I listened jealously to every whisper, for I had sworn to guard and protect her.

“ By accident I found and perused the letter in which Mr. Claridge commissioned my husband to procure him the poison, alleging, as he said, that it was needed to destroy ver-

min. My brain was sharpened by mistrust, and I watched my opportunity to waylay and gain possession of the packet as it left the house. It is here—look at it—the direction is my husband's hand-writing, the line inside is to the effect that he hoped it would answer its purpose; that is the packet fastened with its printed label, just as it came from the hands of the chemist. I have good reason to affirm that Edward Claridge never poisoned James Fielding!

“But I was not satisfied with even these precautions. I heard of the *fête champêtre* to which they were going, and I also went there in disguise. I kept close to the two men all the day. I listened to their conversation. I was hid close behind them amongst the trees, when James Fielding drank from that sparkling cup which was said to be poisoned. I knew that it was not. But by some strange coincidence Mr. Fielding died only two days afterwards; I heard the dark surmise which greeted the intelligence, and in a moment of

uneasiness I sought out the doctor who had attended him in his last moments, and by rousing his suspicions, persuaded him to take means for the discovery of the truth. He did so, and steadily affirmed that the death was attributable to natural causes. I prayed him to sign a paper to that effect, which he did, having it carefully prepared and witnessed. I have that paper before me now, and with the others I wish to give it into your safe keeping—only to be used in case of necessity.”

As she spoke she passed me the three papers. and made a sign as though to dismiss me. But I wanted yet to ask how she came by the possession of that note in Mr. Claridge’s handwriting. She told me in a few words. She had been driven almost to madness at last, by her husband’s ill usage, and had escaped from the house, finding a shelter in an obscure lodging without the gates of the city. There she had lived concealed for many months, hearing only vague reports of her husband’s proceedings, and reading in the papers of the

finding of what was supposed to be her own body in the Seine. Through a like channel she learnt Mrs. Fielding's marriage with Mr. Claridge, and the news struck her with terror; knowing what she did of the past, she felt assured that such an union could only be productive of misery. If the rumour of her husband's attempted crime did not reach Mrs. Claridge's ears, at least the proofs of his villainy were in Captain Rogerson's hands, and could be made use of at any time or for any purpose.

At any hazard to herself, Mrs. Rogerson determined to gain possession of these, and in the dead of the night she succeeded in gaining admittance to her husband's office, and extracting them from his bureau. Since that time she had lost sight of Salome Claridge, and one only thought had seemed to be uppermost in her mind, to follow her husband's footsteps, to watch his course, and protect her son. She knew all about the disgrace and poverty which subsequently came upon

Captain Rogerson. When in a miserable London lodging-house, her boy wanted food and clothing, he did not know who was the lonely woman on the floor above, who sedulously shrinking from his father's sight, yet supplied him with the necessaries of life. He had been at school, and a woman used to come to the playground to sell chestnuts—he never knew that she was his mother! When he was the heir to that great fortune, and rode about the country on his pretty pony, he did not know who the stranger was waiting for as she sat by the wayside. Even at Redcar, he knew nothing of the woman in black, nothing of the mother who laid his dead head on her lap, and covered it with such passionate caresses; nothing of her who was carrying out the work which he had left unfinished—saving the beloved one he would have died for—poor mother and poor son!

Terrible accounts reached us the following morning of Captain Vivian's wild ravings and

intemperate grief. No one had the least influence over him, scarcely anyone dared go near him. And in the midst of all this his long-alienated wife crossed his threshold, going back to her duty. We could not gainsay her, and besides, we had no authority; she calmly asserted her name and position to the medical men in attendance, and claimed her right of admittance to the sick room. We never heard how she was received, nor what was the influence she exercised, but the next accounts of Captain Vivian were improved; we were told of the arrangements she was making for the funeral, how the remains were to be taken by rail to the burial place attached to their own home. And when the fly passed in which Captain Vivian was going to the station, we clearly distinguished the dark figure of the woman in black sitting beside him. We never heard of either of them afterwards—only some little time later there came a valuable ring addressed to Cecil, in which

was a tiny morsel of dark brown hair, the initials, "G. R. V.," and a date. Cecil put it on her finger in tearful silence, and she wears it to this day.



## BOOK III.

## CHAPTER I.

HOW SALOME MADE ACQUAINTANCE WITH AN  
OLD FRIEND OF OURS.

"Of all the created comforts, God is the lender : you are the borrower, not the owner."

RUTHERFORD.

"Curses, like young chickens, always come home to roost."

WE were back again at Burton Abbots. Salome had returned to us, and was sitting beside me in the drawing-room, a bit of delicate embroidery between her busy fingers, while she ran on story after story, descriptive

of her southern visits, and the new friends she had made during her absence.

Mr. Scott was staying in the house ; he had arrived yesterday, and was to remain over Cecil's birthday. Now he and she were together in the library, looking through business papers, and as the door was ajar, we could catch the monotonous hum of their conversation.

It was pleasant to hear Salome talk, she had such a sweet, clear voice, and through every anecdote there ran a vein of light-hearted merriment. I had been quite dispirited lately, but I cheered up as I listened to her, and incited her to go on and on, till the gloaming tried my eyesight, and I was obliged to relinquish my needle, and sit with my hands crossed on my lap.

" Oh, Mimi, and we had such fun one day, at Beaconfields ! You know aunt Ruth, uncle Edward's wife, is very strict and particular. She is very kind, and I like her very much, but she keeps my cousins too tight, and won't

let them wear smart dresses, or read novels, and she tears their hair all away from their foreheads, and makes them look quite ugly, though they are really pretty girls. Of course they don't like it, and when they are away from her, they are quite different to what they are in her presence; if they are joking, or telling a good story, and she comes into the room, they stop, look confused, and whisper, 'Don't tell, mamma;' it is such a pity! Well, I was going to tell you, the Charltons made up an expedition to go and eat syllabub at a farm belonging to one of their sons, and they asked Sophy and Jane Corbyn to go with them. We had such planning and arranging before we dared ask aunt Ruth's leave, and when we did, to our horror, she only gave permission conditionally that we went under her escort. If you had only seen Rose Charlton's face when we made our appearance, headed by Aunt Ruth. She was mounted upon a high stool, sticking peacock feathers round the looking-glass in the farm parlour, and she

bundled down in such a hurry ; and Mrs. Charlton pretended to be so very glad and hospitable, and so delighted to see Mrs. Corbyn, and the others all looked so black. There was rather a large party, every one of whom was known to my cousins, but I was quite a stranger, and after sitting for half an hour in a corner, feeling very lonely and stupid, I was inexpressibly surprised by a gentleman coming up and claiming my acquaintance. He was a young man, with a very pleasant face, though not exactly handsome. He called me by my name, and seemed very glad to see me, and rather amused by my not remembering him—do you guess who it was ? I have been always intending to tell Cecil, for he's a friend of hers, and of yours too."

"A friend of mine, dear ! no, I'm sure I do not know who it could be ; we know so few people."

"Oh ! but this is a great friend of yours, an old friend and a new acquaintance, all in one,

—surely you guess? He told me such a great deal about you both, and what you had been doing at Redcar; far more than you wrote me.”

“Not John Phillips!” I exclaimed involuntarily.

“Even so, Mimi,” Salome answered laughingly as she came and knelt down beside me, and rested her elbows on my knee.

She was a pretty creature, and as she turned her smiling face towards me, the daylight falling on the delicate features, so softly tinted, and on her long, yellow hair, I could not resist putting my hand under that dimpled chin, and bending down and kissing her forehead.

Cecil and Mr. Scott were coming out of the library, and Salome started up to publish her news.

“Cecil, I always forgot to tell you, I saw your friend, John Phillips, two days before I came here. He was staying with the Charltons, near Beaconfields, and he asked after you and

Mimi, and desired me to remember him to you."

I studiously avoided looking up to detect the crimson which I felt must be on Cecil's cheek, but I heard the nervous hesitation in her voice, as she made answer—

"Oh, did you? I hope he was well."

She would not ask for any more news of him, though I knew she was burning with impatience to hear everything Salome could tell her. Her curiosity was restrained by her painful self-consciousness, and she turned the conversation into another channel. Mr. Scott's cough had a dry, significant accent as he strode back to the library, saying he must finish his business, and quickly remembering something that I had to do upstairs, I followed his example and left the girls to themselves. Cecil would be so secure of Salome's unsuspectance that she would not mind cross-questioning her when there were no listeners, and Salome would be only too ready and willing to tell all she knew.

When I went downstairs again Mr. Scott was still in the library, and I joined him there. He had left his books and papers, and drawn an easy chair close to the fender. It had been a cold summer, and we had had fires almost every evening.

We had told Mr. Scott all that had occurred at Redcar, and he had listened to the recital with intense interest. Even his short acquaintance with George Vivian had attached him to him, and he heard of his sorrows and untimely death with regretful sympathy. Now he and I sat together and talked of Cecil's plans and prospects. Mr. Claridge had been seriously ill, and Mr. Scott had been up to London to see him. He told me about his visit and the change which those constantly-occurring epileptic fits appeared to have made in Mr. Claridge's state; the medical men apprehended a gradual softening of the brain, and his growing childishness of mind and disposition strongly confirmed their fears.

"He is perfectly quiet and harmless, now,"

Mr. Scott said ; " he did not remember me in the least when I went into his room, but seemed intent on playing dominoes with the doctor's little niece—a pretty child of eight or nine, who they tell me is his constant companion. It is pitiable to see a fine, strong man, such as he is, reduced to such a plight."

" He is not very much altered, then?"

" Not in features, nor does he even appear much aged ; his hair is as thick and brown as ever, his frame as heavy ; but he has a slight contraction of the right side of his face, and his eyes are weak and deadened ; when he walks there is a little stoop about the shoulders."

" He was a very handsome man," I said.

" Very," my companion answered ; " and he is even now a splendid wreck. But I find the greatest difference in the expression of his countenance. You remember what fixed, hard lines there used to be about his mouth ? Those have all disappeared, and the feature is as smooth and mobile as a little child's."



I heard him laugh as I stood watching his game, and it was as a child laughs, so soft and low and musical in sound. It was quite touching to see his affection for his small companion."

I lifted the blazing coal in the grate, spread out my hands in the warmth, and thought of Mr. Claridge as I remembered him—how different to the poor imbecile of whom we were speaking!

Mr. Scott interrupted my recollections. "Cecil and I have been speaking of her father. She wishes to have him back at Burton Abbots."

"She has told me so," I said, faintly. I hardly relished the proposal.

"Her heart seems bent on it, poor child," Mr. Scott continued; "and she seems to regard it in a *duty* light which is difficult to combat. I have promised her to make inquiries of the Doctors if such an arrangement may safely be entered upon, and let her know the result. She speaks of going up to London

sometime this autumn on purpose to see her father. And that reminds me, Miss White, has Cecil said anything to you about going to the York balls? the Hunt is fixed for the 9th of November, and Lady Armitage wishes to secure her rooms at the hotel?"

I said that I had heard Cecil promise Salome only the night before to accept Lady Armitage's chaperonage, and I believed the letter doing so had been written and sent off that afternoon. Mr. Scott remarked he was very glad, and began to discuss our arrangements. I told him how I wished to go and pay visits to some friends in and about my native place, and was only deterred from choosing the time of these York balls, by a special request from Cecil and Salome to make one of their party. Cecil was shy, and disliked going out alone, and Lady Armitage had kindly included me in the invitation. Mr. Scott was of Cecil's opinion, and assured me that my Repton visits might well be postponed; he would not listen to my remon-

strance, how that I was only an old governess who would be in the way and out of place at such gaieties, assured me that the Hunt ball was a sight well worth seeing, let alone the interest I was sure to feel about Cecil's *début*—I must go. And, from the way in which he said that *must*, I began to think there was some necessity for it that I had overlooked. In the five minutes' silence that ensued, I was planning over to myself what my dress should be, and how I would have a cap with that fashionable magenta colour, and wear the new brooch with Salome's hair which Cecil had given me—what a foolish old woman I am !

Cecil's birthday came and passed over without comment or observance, for so she had requested. We only marked the day by going to Kirby Holme with a basket of hot-house peaches for the Evans children, and bringing back a supply of little gifts for the Sunday scholars.

The next morning Cecil was for several hours closeted in the Library with Mr. Scott

and the Kirby Holme solicitor, and all the evening she sorted some fusty, yellow parchments, which crinkled and creaked as she turned them over.

When she came up to bed she had a folded paper in her hand, and she followed me into my room, and seated herself over the fire whilst I began to undress.

"Mimi," she asked suddenly, "why did you never tell me of this curse on the property?"

"My dear—" I said, stopping short and looking at her.

"You should not have let me discover such a thing by accident," she said, without taking any notice of my explanation. "I ought to have known it years ago."

"But I have no faith in it, and you can't have either," I remonstrated.

"My mother gave it faith, as I learnt to-day," Cecil said softly. "I found a proof in her own handwriting that she did so; and surely the baneful effects of the curse are

corroborated. We have only to look back on the sorrows of the past to see that they are so. Oh, Mimi, an evil deed never prospers, it always flings its shadow, its curse over the future. Think of my mother's life and of mine!"

It was the first time she had alluded to her own sorrows, and I looked at her with a full heart.

"Yes, Mimi dear, *my* life too, think what it has been, and what in all probability it must be; but we won't talk of it. I daresay you thought it was all for the best not to tell me, and perhaps as you say you did not yourself give credit to the tale; but you should not have hidden it from me. People attach such different importance to things; what is a little matter to one has such a real, heart-stirring interest to another. You attach no importance to this curse, but I seem to feel it corroding my very existence. No matter that the dust of years has nearly concealed it, the

sin has never been expiated, and its shadow lies still upon Rupert de Claridge's descendants. I shall never rest until it is removed."

She spoke in a voice of low, choked passion, with a contraction of her broad forehead, and that nervous clutching of her fingers which was always remarkable when her feelings were deeply stirred. I was surprised to see what I should have reckoned such a trivial matter, only a family superstition, affect her thus visibly; but I forgot the natural and somewhat gloomy enthusiasm which she had inherited from her mother, and how it was likely to be roused by a legend to which, as she said, the facts of her family history offered a strange corroboration.

"Mine has been an inert, careless life hitherto, Mimi," the girl said; "I have been living only for myself, and neglecting the great responsibilities which God has laid upon me. I want to do otherwise now, to begin at once to fill my place and try to do my portion of work. It is no use saying that I wish

my position had been other than it is ; it would be wrong to say that, for of course God knew best when He provided the work for me and me for the work, and when He lays down the duty we have only to take it up and perform it, not to lose our time in remonstrances or idle regrets. But, when I think of the thousands of souls and bodies, that so to speak come under my charge, and make part of my duty, my heart fails within me ; for years, through my ignorance and thoughtlessness they have been neglected. How can I strive to bring God's blessing nearer to their hearts and homes ? Mr. Scott showed me my mother's will to-day, have you ever seen it ? Her love and sense of justice were at war one with the other when she made it ; she could not bear to deprive her unborn child of its inheritance ; and yet she seems to have felt that this unhallowed possession could be productive of little happiness. Do you know that in the event of my death before attaining my majority, the whole of this Burton Abbots

property was to have been restored to the Church? There are full directions added to the will for the building and endowing of a Parish Church, for the erection and maintenance of Almshouses, and also for the very conversion of these walls into a Refuge for Indigent Ladies; the surplus was to be given to charities in connection with the Church. Now I am of full age and all is mine, those plans null and void, my mother's pious scheme is only a bye-gone dream; shall I stand by in my miserable splendour and see my work-people uncared for and without a single religious privilege, Mimi?" and her tones sank to an awe-struck whisper, "will not God's curse come doubly upon me if I withhold my hand?"

"Dear child," I said, fondly laying my hand on her head, "this is too serious a question to be decided in a hasty moment. I can well understand that your heart is heavy when you dwell on it, and I honour your anxiety to do your duty towards your dependents. It



has long been my desire to see the parish more earnestly cared for, and the church accommodation such as to benefit, not only a few solitary ones, but the thousands of poor around us. There is plenty of work before you, Cecil, if you are earnest in seeking it out, great toil for God and the advancement of His kingdom. May He give you grace rightly to employ your precious talents," and in a soft good-night I bent my lips to her forehead and kissed her.

## CHAPTER II.

## JOHN PHILLIPS' LETTER.

"Lovers say the heart hath treble wrong  
When it is barr'd the aidance of the tongue."

SHAKESPEARE.

CECIL carried out her resolution of endowing Salome with the very considerable sum which had been augmenting during her minority; but her schemes for the recovery of the small estate of Craigmoor, which for generations had been in Mr. Fielding's family, were unattended with success. The place was scarcely recognisable now, having been purchased as a speculation by a builder, who had parceled it out into small villa residences, and removed

every trace of the unpicturesque greystone house so square and massive, which used formerly to stand in gloomy solitude, in the midst of its pasture lands. Cecil gave up all hope of its recovery, and Salome never heard that such an idea had been even entertained. She would hardly have been disappointed though, had she learnt the failure of the plan, for she had no childish associations with Craigmoor, having been born abroad, and taken little interest in the place.

She was overwhelmed by the sense of Cecil's liberality for one half-hour after the intelligence of her little fortune was broken to her, and strenuously refused its acceptance, saying she was far happier to be dependent on her sister; but Cecil represented the case as merely an act of restorative justice, screening her father, as she easily could, from Salome's childish unsuspicion, and pretending that there had been some entanglement of money affairs between their respective parents, which only her coming of

age had satisfactorily arranged. And, in the excitement of copying a china rose in paper, our little Salome speedily forgot her arguments or the necessity for them.

In the afternoon we were surprised by the arrival of Susan and Charlie Egerton. They had returned from Redcar only a day or two previously, and they casually mentioned that their sister had gone south on a visit to friends. By some means or another we had learnt that Major McIntyre had sailed for India without making any declaration of his supposed attachment, and that Miss Louie and her mamma had taken his defalcation seriously to heart. I noticed the least perceptible smile on Cecil's face, when Louie's absence was alluded to.

Charlie was looking very shy and nervous, and his colour came and went at each opening of the drawing-room door. Salome had been out riding, and she made her appearance in her pretty little riding-hat, her long skirts

gathered between her small, white gauntleted hands.

Her face flushed a little at the sight of our visitors, for I had thought it wise to give her some advice on her deportment after her return to us, and I had particularly admonished her as to her conduct towards the Egertons, with whom she would most probably be brought in contact. She kissed Susan rather shyly, and after giving her hand to Charlie, came and sat down on a low stool almost in my pocket. Charlie made a few remarks to her, but she answered him merely in monosyllables, and traced out the pattern of the bright flowers on the hearth-rug with the end of her riding-whip. I felt quite vexed with her, and with myself too, for having, by my unwise admonitions, made her so apparently self-conscious and ill at ease.

Cecil carried off Susan to the conservatory, and in her absence our conversation turned upon poor George Vivian and his untimely

fate. Charlie's voice quivered, and I saw Salome glance up hastily and inquiringly. These two young men had been great friends, as I was well aware, and I could understand and sympathize with the deep feeling which Charlie now displayed in reverting to George, and dwelling on the rarely beautiful points of his character.

Warming to his theme, he gave me anecdote after anecdote, illustrative of his goodness and thoughtfulness for others, and his devotion to his unworthy father ; and Salome listened with an unusual look of interest on her sweet face. It was a very sad story ; her eyes quite brimmed and overflowed, and she turned away her head, but not before my companion had detected her emotion.

He turned the conversation quickly into another channel to distract her thoughts. He began to talk about John Phillips, and gave me a portion of a letter to read, which he had received from him in answer to his announcement of the sad event at Redcar.

Whilst I was busy with the closely-written page, Charlie strove to enlist Salome in conversation. I heard him talking about walks, and drives, and weather, in company tones, which would not have led one to suppose there was a single point of interest between him and his companion.

I looked up at the two, at last, in a little irritation, thinking what silly children they were, and wondering why, or if my presence could be a restraint to them.

Salome's face was flushed the deepest crimson; her fingers tightly interlaced, and she met my eye with almost a glance of entreaty. I was folding and giving back the letter, and her eyes followed it into Charlie's hand.

"I don't know if you care to see this," he said shyly, "do you remember John Phillips, who used to live at the Vicarage?"

I did not hear what she said in answer, it was so lowly enunciated, but she extended her hand without hesitation and took the letter. She turned herself more to the light,

and bent her head down while she read it. She took a long time, longer than seemed warranted by the clear writing and her young eyes, and when she returned it her cheeks were quite stained with tears. But no wonder—it was a sorrowful letter, on a very sad topic, and it might well stir up her feelings.

“Salome saw John the other day when she was at Beaconfields,” I observed cheerfully.

Charlie asked after him and about the circumstances of their meeting; at the same time inquiring if Salome knew whether he carried out his plan of visiting Wales. Charlie had written to invite him to Torrehill, but had as yet received no answer.

Salome knew little or nothing, and looked unaccountably confused and uncomfortable, and all the time I was reproaching myself and thinking what a great mistake I had made in my unwary communications. Really in these cases one never knows what to do for the best. I thought I had hit on a happy plan at last in advising the two to go and look



for Cecil and Susan in the conservatory, but by an ill chance at the very moment when they were preparing to set out, the girls reappeared, and my aim was frustrated.

Cecil wondered what made me plunge so immediately into the discussion of John Phillips' plans, despite her very evident discomfort, but I knew she would be disappointed if she did not see that letter, and as I suspected, Charlie at the first allusion to it, offered it to her for perusal. There were some particular inquiries after her about the conclusion, which I knew would touch her deeply. John Phillips asked Charlie to mention how she was, and the sentence had been continued further, only Charlie had torn off the other page before giving it to me. I glanced at her triumphantly—surely his marked interest in her was apparent now! Afterwards I expected her brow to lighten, and her tone to grow happier. I felt momentary disappointment when she gave back the letter without comment, and my ear caught a deep-drawn sigh.

My charge was an enigma to me, and made my heart often sad and heavy within me: Not that Cecil was not good and right-principled and true-hearted; she was all this and more, and if sometimes sharp and hasty in her judgment it was rather in her hatred of sin than from detestation of the sinner, and she was tenderly lenient to the penitent. No one could call hers a bitter or unwomanly nature who saw her fondle a little child or devise some soothing alleviation for the suffering; but her first thought was ever for others, her study the increase of the happiness of those around her; but hers was a cruel lot, hers a painful nature against which to battle in secret and unceasingly, and the dark knowledge of sin, which had come to her thus early in life, could not again admit unclouded happiness to her heart. She never forgot the story of her father's ill-doing, she mused on it in solitude and remembered it in her daily prayers; her natural temperament was not of the brightest, she knew little of the spirit.

buoyancy of youth, old age had come prematurely upon her, and I read its weary experiences in her heavy brow, her tremulous accents, and the increasing melancholy of her countenance.

"She is growing just like her mother ; do, Miss White, try and make her happier," Cliff groaned in my ears, and I encouraged Salome in mischief and nonsense, I invited company to the house, and strove to make the surrounding atmosphere cheerful and exhilarating. I found her amusement and interests, and in secret I sought to reason with her, but all in vain ; Cecil had kept up bravely during the excitement of her visit at Redcar, but the re-action was proportionably great when once the necessity for exertion was removed.

Casually we heard that John Phillips had declined the invitation to Torrehill, and with morbid sensibility Cecil read in his refusal a direct evidence of his indifference to herself ; he had had the power of coming into her neighbourhood, of seeing and meeting her

constantly, yet had not judged the offer worthy his acceptance. Poor girl, she said little; these proud, suffering, morbid natures rarely do, but she winced at the mere mention of his name, and the silence of her own room witnessed many an hour of agonized heart-burnings. I daresay I was not the person best fitted to be her friend just then; my own disposition was so different that I could not always understand the phases of hers, and I was little skilled in the modes of heart treatment and comfort. I could only sorrow when she sorrowed, and tell her that I did so—foolish old woman that I was!

A growing interest in all that pertained to her poor mother characterised Cecil at this time; she persuaded Cliff to entrust her with the key of the closed room, and would spend hours there poring over the books and papers, making a strange, weary acquaintance with the dead heart which had given life to her own. Once she brought down "The Christian Year," and with a sad smile showed me

the portion which her mother's hand had copied ; she was very fond of the book, and she took a great fancy to this particular copy, keeping it constantly in her hand, and committing much of its contents to memory. That it was one of the best human comforters I was well aware, for I had tried it myself, and in trouble and anxiety learnt to estimate its beauty and truthfulness ; and more than once I showed Cecil my favourite passages, and we read them over together, and spoke softly of the good hopes which they awakened.

END OF VOL. II.

